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Knightmare

The Forbidden Gate

Dave Morris

Illustrated by Jan Thwaites



YEARLING BOOKS

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BABYLONWALK

'Look at this!' called Jimmy.

'What is it? What's he found now?' asked Pippa.

Sam let go of her arm. 'You wait here, I'll go and see.' Pippa heard Sam walk back a few yards. 'Oh, that's odd. I've never noticed it until now . . .'

Pippa tapped her white stick against the kerb. From the warm hoppy smell in the air, she knew they must be on the other side of the road from the pub. Since school broke up, Pippa had been staying with her friend, Samantha. They had come this way dozens of times, on their way to and from the shops. There hadn't been anything remarkable here before.

Pippa turned round and carefully made her way back.

'Hey!' said Jimmy. Watch you don't step into the road.'

Tin not a total nerd,' said Pippa.

'Yeah - unlike you, Jimmy!' chimed in Sam. 'He's found an old gate, Pippa.'

'What? One that was never here before? You've lived just around the corner for years, Sam.'

'Well, I suppose I never noticed it.' Sam described it to her friend. There was a wooden gate set between two old stone posts. Jimmy had to stand on tiptoe to look over. On the other side was an overgrown path of moss covered stepping-stones, shaded from the afternoon sunlight by maple and sycamore trees. Bees buzzed idly in the summer heat. A butterfly slowly unfolded its wings, glittering like a jewel.

'It doesn't sound at all like the sort of thing you'd expect to find in this part of London,' said Pippa.

Jimmy climbed up on to the top of the gate. 'No, it's really weird. It must run between the infant school and the block of flats, I suppose, and you just can't

see it from there because of the trees on either side.'

Pippa rested her hand against one of the posts, and immediately her fingers found an indentation. 'Hey, there's something written here.'

Sam plucked away tendrils of ivy. 'It says "Babylon Walk". Oh, Jimmy, don't fool about. You'll fall—'

There was a scrabbling sound as Jimmy disappeared from view, followed by a thump and a loud 'Ow!' from the other side of the gate.

Sam peered over. 'Are you hurt, clumsy?'

Jimmy was rubbing a graze on his knee. The fall had brought tears to his eyes, but he blinked them away and pretended it was nothing. It was bad enough being a younger brother, without getting called a softy as well. 'Come on, let's see where it leads,' he said.

Sam glanced along the strange path. There was something really eerie about it, like it was totally out of place. 'We ought to go back. You've got to get that cut cleaned up.'

'You'll sound just like Mum in a few years, you know that?' Jimmy started along the path.

'Oh, wait a minute.' Sam reached over and pulled the latch, but the gate was locked.

Jimmy waited. He had not really been keen to explore the path on his own, but luckily Sam hadn't thought to call his bluff. He went back and waited while the girls climbed over.

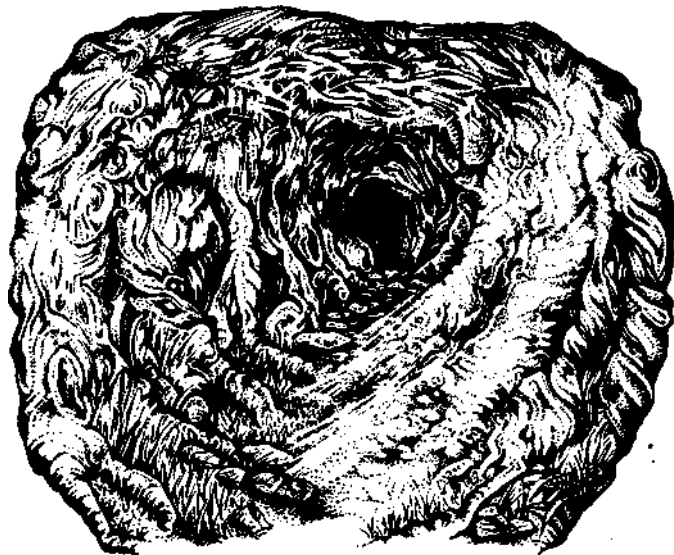
'It's very quiet, isn't it?' Pippa noticed after they had gone only a few paces. 'You can hardly hear the traffic on the road at all.'

Sam pushed at the overhanging branches. It was like walking down a low green tunnel, golden light hanging in sparse patches between the shade.

Jimmy plucked something from a leaf and put it on his sleeve. 'Look at my caterpillar.'

Sam curled her lip. 'Ugh! It looks like a big green slug. You're disgusting.'

Pippa was beginning to feel uneasy.



'Look, isn't it time we were heading back?'

'But we haven't found where it leads to yet!' protested Jimmy.

'We'll look another time,' said Sam. She took Pippa by the arm and started to lead her back. She could see the deathly hush had given her friend the creeps, and she wasn't going to expose her to Jimmy's taunts.

As they made their way back to the gate, Jimmy turned and cupped a hand to his ear. 'Listen - did you hear that?'

Sam made a face at him. 'Stop messing about, Jimmy.'

'No, really, there's something there.' Jimmy stopped and took one step back along the path. Just as he did, an enormous dog came padding softly out of the shadows under the trees.

'Wow!' said Sam. Seeing Pippa's confusion, she added: 'It's a big gangling dog, Pippa. He's lovely!'

The dog came bounding up to them, wagging his tail. He looked to be half bloodhound and half everything else. He



almost knocked Jimmy over with a slurp of his slobbering tongue.

'Eyechh! Gross!' howled Jimmy, wiping spittle off his face.

Sam patted the dog. He seemed friendly enough. In fact, almost too friendly. When they returned along the path to the gate, he insisted on following them.

'Shoo! Scram! You have to go back now,' Sam told the dog as she helped Pippa over the gate.

They got over the gate and started down the hill towards home. Moments later, there was a soft thud on the pavement behind them. They turned. The dog had jumped over the gate and was now trotting along behind them down the road.

'He's determined to come home with us,' said Sam.

'Maybe there's a creepy old house where he lives at the end of the path, and the cruel owner maltreats the poor thing,' suggested Pippa, smiling at her own flight of fancy.

* * *

'No, Samantha, of course you can't keep him. Tell her, George.'

Sam's father glanced over the top of his drawing-board. 'You can't keep him sweetheart,' he said dutifully.

Sam put a protective arm around the dog, whom she'd decided had to have the name Gobble. It seemed to fit - so far he had gobbled his way through an entire steak and an old piece of pie which Sam's mother had found in the fridge.

'But he chose us,' Sam protested. 'He followed us home.'

'Like children, dogs don't have any say as to who they live with, dear,' said her mother.

'But can't we keep him for just a little while? We can't put him out in the street!'

Sam's father took off his glasses, pinched the bridge of his nose, and sighed. 'Well, I suppose he'll have to stay for a few days. Just until we find the owner.'

'Pippa thinks he's a nasty old guy in a creepy house,' put in Jimmy.

'Oh, not *really*,' said Pippa.

'So he can stay, then?' Sam persisted. 'For now, anyway?'

Her mother nodded. 'But he sleeps out at the back. You can put a box outside or something for him. I'll find an old blanket we don't want. Tomorrow I'll put a notice in the newsagent's window.'

'I hope we find the owner soon,' said Jimmy. 'I wouldn't have minded that steak myself!'

Pippa woke suddenly, with a slight gasp. Her heart was thudding in her chest. Her eyes snapped open, but of course that made no difference. She was surrounded by darkness as always. She had just been having a dream in which dead tree branches brushed her face and odd sounds came out of the night to frighten her. She had been running, stumbling, sprawling along a secret path. Behind her there had been a hot damp snuffling, like some sort of animal... Or had there been someone else there . . . ?

Pippa blinked. No, she'd lost it. Her dreams were always confused medleys of

smell, sound and touch. She could never remember them for long.

Outside in the night, she heard a faint sound, a mournful double-tone. It took her a few moments to place it, but she was good at that sort of thing. *A hunting horn*, she thought. *But, here in the middle of South London . . . ? Surely not!*

She waited, her heartbeat returning to normal as the memory of her nightmare faded. She had just about convinced herself that she had dreamt the hunting-horn too - a fugitive scrap of her nightmare that had spilled over into wakefulness - when it came again. A ghostly blare from far away - as though, just beyond the streets with their occasional hum of late-night traffic, lay wild moors and windswept heaths.

The idea was absurd, of course. Yet another example of Pippa's overactive imagination getting the better of her. The nearest thing to a 'wild moor' around here was a rather meagre patch of common about half a mile

away. Not much point hunting there: you could ride from one end to the other in a little over a minute.

The horn sounded again. Pippa turned over and started to pull the pillow around her ears.

Suddenly there was a furious barking from Gobble, down in the back garden. Other dogs took up the cry, sending a cacophony of barks across the moonlit roofs.

Most people had their windows open because of the heat. Pippa heard someone yell something from the house over the back. Then there was an exasperated cry from Sam's parents, sleeping in the room next to hers. She heard a sort of sheet-entangled sleepy stomping, then Sam's father's voice calling out of the window: 'Stop that, you stupid dog! Shut up and go to sleep!'

Hadn't anyone else heard the hunting-horn, then? Just her and Gobble? That struck Pippa as rather uncanny. And, as she drifted back into a troubled sleep, another thought kept gnawing at her brain.

Gobble's bark hadn't been the friendly sort of sound she'd heard him make before.

He'd sounded terrified ...



SHARP KNIVES AND SHADOWS

'So you didn't hear anything at all?' said Pippa.

She and Sam were sitting on the front steps. It was just after breakfast, but already the morning was promising the same sort of blistering heat as the day before. It was too exhausting to think of doing much but spread out there in the sun.

'Maybe it was just a rumble of thunder,' suggested Sam. 'We could do with a storm, to clear the air. . .'

Jimmy was inside. They could see him through the open front door, hunched over his Gameboy as he punched buttons to the accompaniment of tinkling little electronic bleeps. He complained that he

couldn't see the screen if he brought it out into the sunshine. Sam had got fed up of telling him what a pallid little maggot he was turning into, sitting indoors playing video games all the time. Anyway, it was nice to have the chance of a sensible chat with Pippa without Jimmy's smarty-pants interruptions.

A shadow fell across the two girls. 'You want anything sharpened?' said a gruff voice.

Sam opened her eyes and looked up, squinting at the lanky figure standing at the top of the steps. It was a boy, thin and sun-beaten and with a face like a ferret, perhaps a little older than Sam and Pippa. He was dressed in very scruffy clothes - not fashionably tatty, like the jeans that Jimmy sometimes wore, but really thoroughly grimy. The sort of worn, dusty look of clothes that you've worked and slept in. Sam thought he might be a gipsy.

'Anything,' said the boy again, 'sharpened?' The sun had heated the pavement like a kiln. It made him shimmer as

he stood there, silhouetted against the sky.

Sam felt a bit flustered. He'd taken her by surprise. 'I'll ask my mother,' she said, adding hastily: 'She's only in the kitchen. I shouldn't think so, though.' She took a couple of steps towards the front door, then came back and scooped Pippa up by her arm.

'And can I have a glass of water?' the lanky boy called after them. 'It's as hot as Wayland's forge . . .'

'I don't like the sound of him,' hissed Pippa under her breath as they went inside.

'I don't like the *look* of him. He's like an overgrown gnome.' Sam's nervousness made her giggle.

They went past Jimmy, intent on his game and oblivious of anything else, and into the kitchen. Sam's mother saw something in their faces straight away. 'What's got into you two?' she asked.

Sam blurted out the story of the strange gipsy boy.

Her mother gave her a sidelong

look and a half-smile. It wasn't often she saw Sam so flustered; like most twelve-year-old girls, she usually dealt with everything except clothes and rock stars with an unruffled coolness. 'Well, tell him we don't need anything sharpened,' she said. 'He's not likely to do much of a good job anyway. It's just a sort of begging, really.'

'He asked if he might have a glass of water,' remembered Pippa.

'I can't see any harm in that,' said Sam's mother.

Sam filled a glass and took it back through to the hall. She was slightly shocked to see the boy had come down the steps and was now crouched on the porch. He had one long arm extended through the doorway and was swaying it to and fro, with something like a gipsy charm dangling from his fingers. With his gangling weather-browned limbs, he looked like a giant insect waiting to snare its prey. And, to complete the strangeness of the scene, he was muttering something in a low throaty drone.

Then Sam noticed Gobble. He had slunk right up to the door and was sniffing at the charm. He seemed captivated by the lanky boy's muttering. But his ears were pressed flat and he was shivering in fear.

Sam did the first thing that came into her head. She flung the water at the boy.

He jumped up and back away from the porch, drenched, spluttering, face twisted in surprise that quickly gave way to fury. 'Eh? Fear flense your bones, wench! I—'

Sam felt a bit foolish. Maybe she'd over-reacted, but it had looked as if he was doing something to terrify poor Gobble. There was no sense in prolonging the argument. 'We don't need anything sharpened,' she said, and shut the door in his face.

Gobble pressed against her legs and looked up, whimpering.

There was a cry of annoyance from the other room. They looked round to see Jimmy hurl his game down on the floor cushions. He came stamping through, full of petulant disgust. 'I ought to take

this thing back to the shop,' he explained when he noticed Sam and Pippa. 'I was on the way to an all-time high score - and then the screen suddenly got covered in these grinning black grem-lins. That's not supposed to happen.'

Sam curled her fingers in the beam of her torch and watched the shadow it cast on the wall. The result was actually quite good, but it didn't satisfy Sam. 'It doesn't look *much* like a rabbit,' she said, disgruntled.

Sam realized she was talking to herself. At the other end of the room, Jimmy and Pippa were absorbed in a video. When Pippa had first come to stay with them, a couple of weeks before, Jimmy had resented having to narrate bits of films for her. Now he found he rather enjoyed it. It made him appreciate the film more.

There was the whir of the fast-forward. 'That's a love scene,' commented Jimmy dismissively. 'OK, here's the bit where the Black Knight attacks. Lancelot's getting up and grabbing his sword . . .'

A mournful sound cut through the evening air outside, drowning out the clang of steel on the video. Barking madly, Gobble leapt up and ran to the front door.

Jimmy hit the freeze button. 'Jeez - what was *that*?'

'A hunting horn,' said Pippa. 'I told you I heard it last night, Sam.'

'This time we heard it too,' said Sam. She went over to the door. 'Poor Gobble, why are you shivering? Did the horn frighten you?'

Gobble began to whine and scratch at the door.

'Don't be silly, sis,' said Jimmy. 'He just wants to go out.'

Sam tried to pull Gobble around to the back door. But when Gobble didn't want to go somewhere, there was no budging him. He sniffed at the door.

Pippa turned her head suddenly and listened. 'Is there someone outside?' she asked.

Sam glanced through the frosted glass. She could only see the blurred yellow light of the streetlamp and the shadow

of the tree in the front garden. But suddenly she was alarmed without knowing why. 'I don't think so . . . Come on, Gobble, I'll put you out the back.'

Still Gobble refused to move from the front door. After a moment he started scratching at it again.

'Samantha,' said Jimmy, imitating his mother's tones, 'put him out quick before he does something on the carpet.'

Sam wasn't keen to let Gobble out the front. She was worried he might wander off. Also, although she hadn't seen anything through the glass, Pippa had put the notion into her head that somebody was lurking outside in the dark. With her parents both out of the house, she wasn't sure what to do.

Gobble gave a low howl and pressed his nose against the door. It surely couldn't hurt to let him just out into the front garden - as long as she kept an eye on him ...

Sam opened the door. Gobble slipped out like a huge shadow, and was out of the front gate in an instant.

'Gobble!' yelled Sam, chasing off after him.

She raced up the steps, reaching the front gate just in time to see him vanish around the corner. She ran to the end of the road. Gobble was bounding towards the gateway they'd found the day before, sliding through the sodium-lit night without a noise. He ignored Sam's shouts. She ran up behind him, just in time to see him leap the gate with astonishing ease, long legs stretched against the warm evening air.

She looked over the gate. The mysterious pathway was steeped in shadow. It looked far from inviting. Gobble had already disappeared along the path, swallowed by the darkness beyond the streetlamps.

Jimmy and Pippa came up the road. 'Did you catch him?' called Pippa.

'No, he's run off back down the path where we found him.'

Jimmy craned his neck and peered over the top of the gate. 'Well, maybe that's where he lives,' he said.

'Where?' snorted Sam. 'It runs just past the block of flats, right? I mean, there isn't any house *there*, is there?'

'So what shall we do?' said Pippa.

Sam made up her mind. 'You two wait here. I'll go back and get the torch and we'd better go and find him.'

It was only when she got back to the house that she found she'd left the torch on. The bulb had already been getting dim while she was doing her shadow-puppets. Now she shook it but got only a faint and fading gleam.

Sam rummaged in a kitchen drawer, unable to find any spare batteries. She looked into a few cupboards, increasingly frantic, slamming doors in her haste. She gave a gasp of frustration. Then she did a double-take, opening the last cupboard to take another look. There was a candle there which they kept in case of power cuts. Sam snatched it up along with a box of matches and raced back to the gate.

It was a still night, not a breath of wind to stir the sultry heat. Sam got the candle lit with no trouble, and gave

it to Jimmy to hold as she climbed over the gate.

Jimmy stared at the candle dubiously. 'So this is all you could find,' he said, putting as much scorn as he could into the remark.

'Oh, stop complaining and come along,' said Sam. 'And watch that you don't slip— Oh, there!'

There was a ripping sound. 'Oh, great!' said Jimmy, dropping down beside her. 'I tore my best shirt on a nail.'

They helped Pippa over and, in a pool of candlelight, the three children set out along the path. As before, they soon couldn't hear any traffic from the main road behind them. There was no sound at all. Beyond the branches overhanging the path, darkness hung like a thick velvet drape.

'What's that?' said Pippa, her stick brushing something at the side of the path.

Jimmy pulled the vegetation aside to reveal a shiny granite milestone, pitted with age and inscribed with the words *Dunshelm: 70 miles*.



'Seventy miles!' exclaimed Sam. That would be up in the Fens somewhere. What's the point of a milestone like that on this old path that nobody uses?'

'Maybe somebody used it once,' Pippa said. 'It might be very very old - even older than the streets around here.'

They continued on a short way. There was still no sign of where Gobble had got to. Suddenly Jimmy stopped short, spluttering.

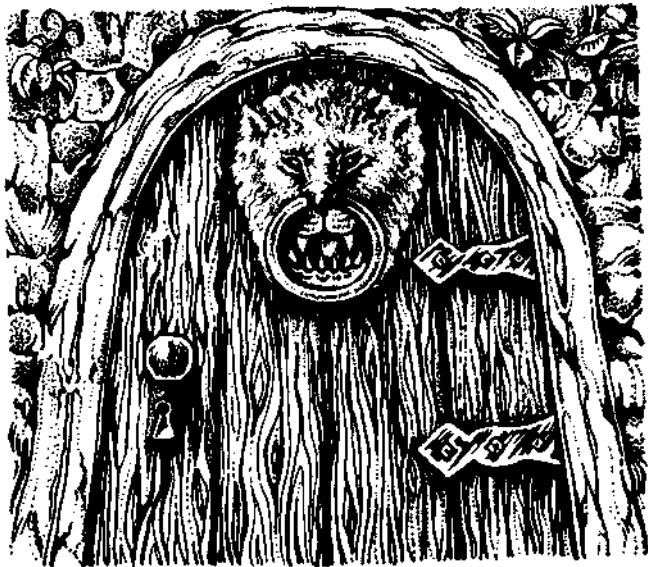
'What is it now?' hissed Sam.

'I walked into a web,' Jimmy said, wiping the invisible silk strands off his face. 'Some dopey spider must have spent the whole day building it right across the path.'

'He didn't expect you to come along and blunder into it, I expect,' said Pippa.

'... Probably thinks you're the ugliest fly he ever caught!' added Sam. She and Pippa couldn't help giggling, despite their nervousness.

Annoyed, Jimmy took the candle and went stamping off along the path ahead of them. He had only gone another few



steps, however, when he gave a gasp and stood gaping.

Sam and Pippa hurried to catch up. They had emerged from under the canopy of trees, and here the path ended. A bizarre sight awaited them in the moonlight. It was a sprawling manor house with high gables and narrow latticed windows. The walls were hidden under a century's growth of ivy. It looked like the kind of place where the Addams Family would live.

The door was a broad portal of oak set under a weathered arch. It had a large

bronze knocker in the shape of a lion's face set into the middle. There was a sign beside the door. It read: *Dunshelm*.

'We must have misread the milestone,' said Jimmy. 'It probably said seventy yards or something.'

'Well, maybe this is where Gobble got to,' said Pippa. Like Jimmy, she was whispering without really knowing why.

'There's only one way to find out,' said Sam boldly. She stepped up to the door and struck loudly with the bronze knocker.



3

UNEXPECTED VISITORS

In the Great Hall of Nightmare, at one end of a long table of richly polished elm, sat an imposing figure. Slowly he surveyed the faces of those who sat along the table, then rose to his feet. Flinging his cloak back, he brought his fist crashing down on the tabletop.

'Nightmare is ours!' snarled Lord Fear in triumph.

The others gave voice to various titters and mutters of approval. They were a grotesque band to look upon: a vile rabble of goblins, ogres and other such beasts, their faces misshapen by malice.

From the far end of the table, an imperious tone silenced the weird company: 'And what of Treguard?'

It was Aesandre who had spoken, the frost-witch, queen of the frozen land of Winteria. Except for Lord Fear, everyone shivered at her words of discord. They were used to cringing obedience; Aesandre was accustomed to command.

'Treguard is taken care of,' began Lord Fear. 'I have— Yes, what is it *now*, Skarkill?'

All heads turned. The lanky figure of Skarkill stood in the doorway. He had just come in from the entrance hall, and he had one weather-beaten hand clamped around the neck of a huge hound. He favoured Lord Fear with a fawning smile, but was unable to keep a spark of smouldering resentment from his eyes. 'Er . . . I've done as you ordered, milord . . .'

Under the brim of his metal helmet, Lord Fear regarded him in withering silence.

'... I got the beast back safe and sound, and no harm done,' went on Skarkill. He scowled at the dog, as if to divert Fear's displeasure from himself. 'He'll have to be punished—' he spat out the word with

relish. 'The mangy hound. Shouldn't have run off in the first place . . .'

'He should never have been *allowed* to run off,' corrected Lord Fear, lowering his eyelids, focusing his gaze of menace. 'Punishment must be meted out wherever it is due . . .'

Tiring of this, he turned away from Skarkill and paced back along the Hall, waving his hand dismissively. 'Take him to the kennels, Skarkill. I will deal with you later. Now, where was I . . .?'

'Telling us about Treguard, master,' put in a goblin helpfully, his wizened face green in the firelight.

'Telling us how you trapped the Lord of Nightmare,' added another even more loathsome in appearance than the first. He plucked absently at a flea crawling in the coarse cloth of his sleeve. He chewed it appreciatively.

'The key to victory is surprise,' said Lord Fear, gloating at the memory. 'Cloaked by my most powerful illusion, I took Treguard unawares. Now I have him trapped within a magic mirror of sulphurous glass . . .'

'Little more than a reflection of his former self, then,' said Aesandre. Her laughter echoed up to the high rafters, sending a chill of dread through the eerie assembly.

Lord Fear allowed a heartless smile to hover on his lips. 'He and his imp. They're no more than a flicker on the other side of a looking-glass.'

The first goblin, Grippa, put his hand up tentatively. 'But what if the mirror got broken . . .?' he ventured.

' . . . Freeing the Lord of Nightmare?' added a second goblin, Rhark. It was not boldness that made them question their master. It was that they feared Treguard just as much.

'It can never happen!' thundered Lord Fear, enraged at the temerity of his minions. He held his clenched hands up before him, giving him the appearance of a demon about to strike. 'My plan is infallible! The mirror in which I have pent them is enchanted, and the enchantment is such that no amount of effort can ever succeed in shattering it. So Treguard is but a memory

now. Put that memory out of your heads.'

Aesandre was alone in being undaunted by Fear's display of anger. Treguard had allies,' she observed dryly. 'We may expect some of them to rally to his aid. To try to oust us from this castle, at least.'

Lord Fear smiled indulgently. 'That is precisely why I have gathered together this brood of evil, my dear Aesandre. By combining our strength we shall easily be able to deal with any interlopers. And in fact there is another reason . . .'

Every face turned to him. Lord Fear scanned them: a hideous, gallow-grinning assembly to scare the wits out of even the bravest of men. It warmed his black heart to behold such a congregation of wickedness.

'In the caverns far below this castle,' he began, 'a dragon slumbers. Dragon's blood is a potent force in wizardry. We shall descend into the caverns, and—'

Three loud knocks resounded through the Great Hall. Someone was at the castle door.

'What?' growled Lord Fear, looking around sharply.

'It appears,' said Aesandre calmly, 'that we have company.'

Fear strode towards the door. 'How is this possible? I must see for myself who has penetrated the cloak of sorcery around this castle!'

He seized the heavy oak door and swung it open ...

'Excuse me, but we've lost our dog,' said Sam to the elderly man standing in the open doorway.

The man was bald and wore formal evening clothes - rather old-fashioned, Sam thought. But he had a kindly smile, and behind his round spectacles his eyes twinkled. 'Oh dear,' he said. 'Well, perhaps you'd better come in.'

They shuffled into a musty old hall panelled in dark wood. An open fire flickered in the other room, which led on to the entrance hall through a wide arch. There were curtains on either side of the arch, but Sam caught sight of a long dining-table where a

number of guests sat ready to eat. She particularly noticed, at one end, a stately-looking woman with diamonds glittering on her long slender fingers.

'I'm sorry we've interrupted your dinner,' said Sam.

'Not at all, not at all!' the old man was at pains to reassure her. 'We eat late hereabouts.'

'Is your name Dunshelm?' asked Jimmy suddenly. He had noticed a coat-of-arms hanging on the wall above the mantelpiece. It consisted of a scarlet shield on which was emblazoned a golden fist, above the letter D.

'Eh?' The man appeared momentarily at a loss. 'Um, no, lad; my name's Mr Tymoor. Now, what was this about a dog?'

'We think he ran this way,' said Sam. 'He's a sort of bloodhound . . .'

'More a mongrel, really,' put in Jimmy.

'I see, I see. Well, perhaps he's run around the back. This is quite a big house, you see. I'll send my butler Scargill round for a look. Meanwhile,

why don't you children wait in the library here?'

He opened a door off the entrance hall and waited with a benign smile as they filed past him. He withdrew, and the door closed with a soft click. They were left alone in the long book-lined room.

'Why, Pippa, you're shivering,' Sam suddenly noticed.

'He gave me the creeps!' blurted Pippa, finding her voice at last. She had gone quite pale. 'He sounded so hateful and horrible - like he was angry at us for poking our noses in here!'

'Mr Tymoor?' said Jimmy. 'You're kidding. He seems a fair enough old guy.'

Pippa stood with gaping mouth. 'What? Sam, you must've heard it? That nasty tone in his voice . . . ?'

'Really, Pippa, Jimmy's right. He's just some old fellow. A bit loopy from living in this weird place, maybe, but—'

'Oh, what's the use!' cried Pippa. Sam had been guiding her to the couch. Now she slammed herself down in it and folded her arms sullenly. 'But, I tell you I heard his voice. He's *evil*.'

Several minutes went by. Jimmy explored the far reaches of the library. Sam stayed on the couch with Pippa, but neither of them spoke. There was just the ticking of a grandfather clock in the gloomy old room.

Lightning flashed outside the shutters. There came a rumble as the sky broke in two, followed by the hiss of heavy rain.

'Here's the storm you wanted,' said Jimmy.

'You must get away from here . . .'

'What was that?' said Pippa, sitting bolt upright.

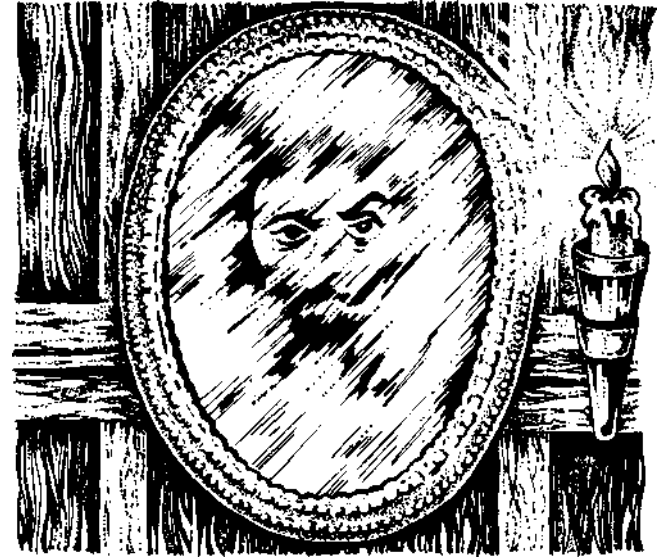
'Listen to me. There is grave danger...'

'What is it, Pippa?' said Sam, seeing her go tense.

'Are you guys trying to freak me out, now?' shouted Pippa. 'I don't think this is funny, Sam!'

'But nobody said anything,' Sam protested.

'It's coming from over there ...' Pippa got to her feet and stumbled across the room. She nearly fell as she blundered into a table, but Sam caught her in time.



'There's nothing there,' said Sam as she watched Pippa frantically run her hands along the wall.

Pippa's fingers encountered an ornate frame. 'It's just an old yellow mirror,' said Sam fretfully. 'Oh, look, please come and sit down, Pippa.'

'You are in peril of your lives. Leave this place at once.'

'There!' cried Pippa triumphantly. 'You must have heard that.'

Sam sighed. 'There's nothing . . .'

'Someone's telling us to leave, Sam! We've got to get out now!'

'Jimmy,' said Sam, 'I think we ought to take Pippa home right away.'

Jimmy tried the doorknob. 'We can't,' he replied. 'It's locked.'

'He's locked us in! Why?' Sam looked at Pippa. She was starting to get rattled herself by now, but her first thought was for her friend. Pippa looked as if she had started to imagine things.

Again the voice spoke to Pippa, though the others could not hear it. It was the voice of a stern man, yet strong and good. Pippa trusted him. '*I am Treguard, Lord Dunshelm,*' he told her. '*My dearest foe has trapped me in this magic mirror—*'

'We'll free you!' said Pippa to the wall.

Sam took her by the arm. 'Pippa, there's no-one there.'

'You cannot free me. No amount of effort can break the mirror — such is its spell. You must save yourselves.'

Jimmy was intent on finding a way out. 'Some of these old libraries have concealed doors - you know, that look like a bookcase from one side. And secret passages. An old house like this—'



He started to fumble with the mirror frame. 'Maybe behind here . . .'

'Jimmy!' said Sam. 'Be careful, or—'

It was too late. With his typical clumsiness, Jimmy had managed to dislodge the mirror from the wall. It fell, exploding on the floor in thousands of shards of smoky yellow glass.

There was a peal of thunder from outside.

A waft of brimstone in the air . . .

And Treguard, Lord of Nightmare, was beside them.



4

HIDDEN PASSAGES

Treguard's booming laughter filled the room. 'What exquisite luck!' he said. 'No amount of *effort* could ever have shattered Fear's magic mirror - but a spot of well-intentioned blundering did the job just fine.'

'I don't understand,' said Sam. 'Who are you?'

'And where did you come from?' said Jimmy.

'Out of the mirror, of course. I tried calling to you when I was imprisoned in it, but only your friend Pippa could hear me.'

Pippa was smiling. Somehow, she felt, everything was going to be all right now. 'This is Lord Treguard,' she told

her friends. 'He'll help us against Mr Tymoor.'

'Mr Tymoor . . . ?' Treguard's dark brows knotted. 'Ah, that's Lord Fear's little joke. *Timor* is Latin for "fear", you see.'

'Lord Fear?' said Sam. 'You mean the kindly old man we spoke to at the door?' This was getting a little too much for her. Mr Tymoor had seemed genuine enough. In contrast, this Treguard - a burly, slightly sinister figure, with his fierce countenance and medieval clothing - might well be a madman. But how had he contrived to appear out of nowhere? Surely not some simple conjurer's trick? And there *was* the fact that the 'nice' Mr Tymoor had chosen to imprison them here . . .

'Oh, I don't know what's true or not!' gasped Sam in confusion.

Treguard stroked his beard. 'Then perhaps I have a way to show you. Pickle!'

As Treguard snapped his fingers, a slim figure danced silently out of the shadows. They hadn't noticed him

before. His movements were as graceful and stealthy as a squirrel's. Clad in green and gold, he had glittering almond-shaped eyes and - could it be? - pointed ears. But it was hard to see him clearly at all, even now he was standing right among them.

"You look like an elf," said Jimmy.

"You look like a baboon," retorted Pickle; "but then, human children often do." He leaned towards Treguard. "Oh, Master, our castle is in the hands of Lord Fear and his minions. What shall we do?"

Treguard folded his arms across his massive chest and smiled. In spite of the predicament, he exuded an aura of cool authority. "First, Pickle, I would have you prove ourselves to these youngsters. Show them some juggling tricks."

Pickle's mouth formed a quizzical 'O' but then, seeing his master was serious, he plucked a number of luminous coloured balls out of mid-air and began to juggle them. When he tired of this, allowing the glowing balls to drop, they



vanished on contact with the floorboards like soap bubbles.

"Wow!" breathed Jimmy. "That was like magic!"

Pickle gazed first at him, then at the other children, with an expression of haughty disdain. "How did they get here, Master?" he asked. "Are they here to take the Challenge?"

Treguard shook his head. "Not in the usual sense, I fear, though the trials that lie ahead of us now will be challenging in the extreme. From the fact that the sound of the mirror breaking has not

brought Fear's servitors to investigate, I deduce that he has already descended into the caverns. We must pursue if we are to thwart his nefarious scheme.'

'Caverns?' said Jimmy, excited.

'What scheme?' asked Sam.

There is a cave far below the ground where a dragon sleeps,' Treguard explained. 'I call him by the name Smirkenorf, but in fact he is older than any language. Lord Fear seeks to slay this dragon as he slumbers, because a dragon's lifeblood is what he needs to empower his ancient sceptre of evil.'

'What happens then?' asked Pippa. Will he become all-powerful?'

'He would become, shall we say, difficult to withstand. Even now, his power is as strong as mine. And he has his servitors with him, while we have no time to wait for allies.' Treguard turned and pressed a section of bookshelf. There was a click, and a panel slid open in the wall.

'Then there really is a secret passage,' said Jimmy.

'Indeed,' said Treguard. 'A maze of hidden tunnels runs throughout and beneath my stronghold. This will take us to the caverns which Lord Fear is seeking.'

Jimmy contemplated the darkness beyond the open panel. 'I've still got the candle . . .' he said nervously.

Treguard raised his eyebrows. 'Ah! All is explained. I was wondering how you came here - as Fear no doubt was, also - for the path to Nightmare is the path of dreams. It can only be traversed as you did, by candlelight, "if your heels be nimble and light. . ."'

'That's from an old nursery rhyme,' said Pippa.

'A very old rhyme indeed,' agreed Treguard, 'which comes from a place on the boundary of dreams. But now, enough talk - we have much to do . . .' He took down a book from the shelf, spoke some spell over the cover, and opened it. A beam of bright light shone from the pages as though from a torch. A sloping tunnel was revealed beyond the open panel.

'An illuminated manuscript, master?' quipped Pickle.

Treguard replied with a wry glance, then addressed the children: 'I would not for all the world lead you into danger, but you will at least be safer at my side than if you remain here. While I live and breathe, I swear I will not see any harm come to you.'

If Sam and Jimmy still felt any wariness of Treguard, it was quite dispelled by the trust Pippa showed in allowing him to take her arm and lead her into the cobweb-strewn tunnel. With Pickle bringing up the rear, his faerie magic casting little flickering beams of light under their feet, they filed down into the caverns.

A long, anciently-worn stairway of rugged rock brought them into a cavern whose walls reached off into the distance. The light from Treguard's book splashed against sparkling veins of quartz crystal.

'Dungeonmaster,' said Jimmy.

'Yes?' replied Treguard, looking back over his shoulder.

'Er . . . no, I meant it's like the computer game *Dungeonmaster*,' Jimmy explained.

'Computers. Virtual reality,' said Treguard. 'It is magic of a sort, I suppose. But this is very real, have no doubt of it.'

They advanced across the cavern. Each footfall echoed in the gloom like the tread of a giant. Patches of darkness indicated gaps in the wall where other tunnels joined the cavern, forming a subterranean maze. Ahead, they could now see a deep chasm stretching from one side of the cavern to the other. It was spanned only by a single narrow bridge - weathered wooden slats strung from knotted old rope. The bridge was barely wide enough for one person.

'We must cross here,' Treguard told them. Scooping Pippa up in his arms, he stepped out on to the bridge and in six bold paces was across.

He put Pippa down and called back to the others: 'It is safe enough so long as you don't look down.'



Sam advanced to the edge of the precipice. Her heart seemed to be hammering in her throat as she edged forwards. The bridge swayed under her weight, each board creaking as she stepped on to it. She was rigid with dread, but felt a strange compulsion to look down, to see how deep the chasm could be—

A very faint *clink* echoed up from the depths. 'I dropped a coin,' Sam heard Jimmy say behind her. 'It took more than twenty seconds to hit the bottom!'

'It must have struck an outcropping,' Treguard answered. 'This chasm has no bottom.'

Sam lost any desire to look down. She took two more steps, and was profoundly glad to feel Treguard's strong arms helping her off the end of the bridge and on to secure ground.

It was Jimmy's turn next. He managed a few faltering steps, then misjudged his balance. He was leaning back slightly without realizing it, so that he did not feel the next plank where he expected it. He started to probe around

with his foot, suspended on his heel as he did.

'No, Jimmy, it's right there! Just step forward!' cried Sam.

Jimmy looked down.

It wasn't like looking off the top of a high building, say, or even the side of a cliff. A dizzying void filled the chasm. Light rebounded from the walls, spilling down impossibly far into the depths. Jimmy felt as if he were far out in space, gazing into the maw of a black hole. The chasm seemed to suck all light and space down into itself. Jimmy's mind swum with vertigo. At any moment he might plunge downwards. He clung to the rope railing in terror.

'Come on, Jimmy,' urged Sam. 'You're more than halfway already.' It wasn't true, but it was the best thing she could think of to say.

'I can't!' said Jimmy through chattering teeth. His lips were drawn back and his eyes were wide with fright.

Pickle reached out his hand and blew across it, sending coloured sparks jumping from his open palm. They were



like tiny fireflies darting to and fro through the air, weaving a pattern of glowing lines as they went. This billow of luminous strands drifted out over the chasm. As Jimmy caught sight of them, he stared as though hypnotised. Pickle gave another puff and the glowing strands floated over to the other side. Jimmy followed, moving like a sleepwalker, until he reached the point where Treguard could snatch him to safety.

'What happened?' said Jimmy, shaking his head to clear it. 'I remember getting frightened, and then there was

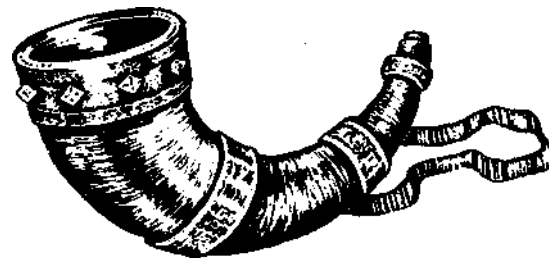
some kind of weird shining figure taking me by the hand and leading me across. It was so strange . . .'

'Don't fret, lad,' said Treguard, laying his hand reassuringly on Jimmy's shoulder. 'You were entranced by magic. Well done, Pickle; you can come across now.'

Pickle skipped out using a ballet-dancer's leap, barely touched the centre of the bridge with his toes, performed an extravagant forward somersault in mid air, and landed amongst them as lightly as a leaf. He bowed.

'Tickle!' snapped Treguard. 'Stop showing off, and—'

A sound came from one of the side tunnels. It was a hunting horn.



5

THE SLEEPING DRAGON

'We have their spoor, milord,' said Skarkill. 'That special scent of goodness. Fair makes you want to retch, it does.'

'So, Treguard has got free of your "unbreakable" magic mirror,' Aesandre remarked coolly to Lord Fear. 'Obviously our definitions of the word vary.'

'Enough!' spat Lord Fear. 'I will brook no interference in my plan. Skarkill, send out your hound - you goblins, go with the beast. It will lead you to our enemies.'

Skarkill gave Gobble a rough shove. Gobble growled and turned to give him a sour look.

'He doesn't want to go, milord . . .'

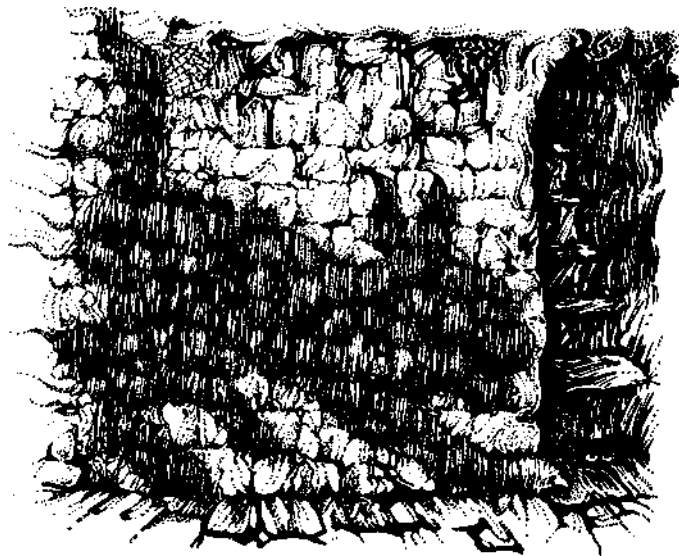
'You fool!' Lord Fear thrust Skarkill

aside and raised his arms above the cringing dog. He began a ghastly chant, weaving a spell that hung thickly in the air like the heaviness before a storm. The goblins clustered back, nervous of such potent sorcery, trying to hide behind their master, Skarkill. But Skarkill saw to it that he was further from the magic-working than any of them. He had no wish to be turned into a toad or somesuch. He'd had enough of that the last time he annoyed Lord Fear.

Light spread from under Lord Fear's cloak. It was a green, unearthly glow. It cast Gobble's shadow tall and misshapen against the rocks.

'Blow your horn now, Skarkill,' hissed Fear. 'If the beast refuses to serve me, its shadow will have to do the job.'

Skarkill raised the horn to his lips and sounded a long low note. It reverberated along the cave walls. As the last echoes shivered away into silence, there came a noise like cloth tearing. It was Gobble's shadow, ripping free and loping silently along the stone walls, hot on the scent of Treguard and his band.



'After it!' shouted Skarkill, whipping his goblins forward. 'Go on, you lazy wretches!'

They followed in a capering shrieking horde - spilling through the warren of tunnels in a black tide of repulsiveness, racing across the rocks hard on the heels of the shadow-hound. And at last they came pouring out into the cavern where Treguard and the others stood.

Treguard saw the shadow-hound's head sliding down from among the hanging stalactites. He drew his sword and slashed at it, but without effect.

'Run!' he called over his shoulder. 'I'll hold it off as long as I can.'

Jimmy and Pickle had hold of Pippa's arms. Sam ran after them a few paces, then turned to look back. It seemed as though Treguard was battling an invisible creature until her eye glanced to the cavern wall behind, where the shadow of a fierce dog could be seen. It lunged and snapped without regard for the sword raised against it. But Sam could see that its own shadowy fangs had already torn shreds out of Treguard's thick jerkin.

Suddenly Sam had a plan. Racing up to where they were fighting, she grabbed the luminous book which Treguard had dropped as he drew his sword.

Treguard saw her out of the corner of his eye. 'I told you to run, girl!' he said between gritted teeth.

Again the shadow leapt. Again the sword failed to hurt it. Again it bit deep into Treguard's sleeve. This time it drew blood.

Sam raised the book in her left hand, directing the beam of light against the cave wall. She contorted the fingers of

her other hand and raised it in front of the book.

A huge shadow was thrown against the wall. This time, Sam decided, she'd actually done it rather well. But then, she was better at doing wolves than rabbits.

The shadow-hound took one look at the wolf's head descending towards it and then, with a thin whimpering cry, it turned tail and scurried back off through the tunnels to rejoin itself to Gobble.

'A masterly trick, young friend,' said Treguard approvingly as he lowered his sword and got his breath back. 'But what of the goblins?'

They both looked across the cavern. A chattering horde of goblins were running towards Pippa, Pickle and Jimmy. Further off, Lord Fear and Aesandre were taking advantage of the confusion to strike out purposefully towards the far end of the cavern.

Jimmy clutched at Pickle's arm as the first goblin came looming horribly out of the shadows. Its face was a mass of warts and scabs with a foul slit of a mouth and



little deep-set stones for eyes. The stench of its breath was indescribable.

Grimacing in distaste, Pickle kicked the goblin somewhere soft. It squeaked and fell back, clattering with rage.

The rest of the goblin horde stalked closer. Now and again one would dart forward to snarl at them, then mingle back into the rest. They reminded Jimmy of a pack of hyenas that he'd once seen on TV. Treguard and Sam were running up behind the goblins, but they could not possibly reach them before Jimmy and Pippa were overwhelmed.

'What about some more of that magic you used on me?' Jimmy suggested.

Pickle arched his eyebrows even more than they were arched already. 'You know, that's good thinking for a mere mortal,' he said. Blowing out phantasmal strands of coloured light, he sent them drifting through the mustered goblins.

The goblins' little eyes rolled, focusing on some unreal image among the strands of light. They swayed and then, all together, stumbled off in pursuit of the floating strands. Sam watched with satisfaction as they went tumbling over the side of the chasm.

'Like lemmings!' she said with disgust.

'Will they come out of the trance?' asked Jimmy.

'Not until they hit the bottom,' said Pickle cheerfully. 'Which is to say, no.'

'Has anyone seen where Lord Fear got to?' asked Pippa.

Treguard had. Pausing only to be certain that the children were safe, he went racing across the cavern in pursuit of his deadliest foes. Then he caught sight of

them: Fear and Aesandre. They were on the very brink of achieving their goal. They had arrived at the immense bronze door set into the cavern wall that led to the dragon's lair. Aesandre's frost-magic had already made the great lock brittle enough to snap. Even now, Lord Fear had set down his sceptre of evil in order to exert all his strength in opening the heavy door.

Fire filled Treguard's eyes. He cast his sword aside. This foe would only sully the clean steel.

Fear turned, lips twisted in malice, as he heard the sword clatter on the stone floor. Treguard!' he snarled. 'You can't stop me. Soon my sceptre will be baptised in dragon blood.'

Treguard shook his head as he slowly advanced, a step at a time. 'No,' he said simply. Then he swiftly strode forward and the battle was joined.

Treguard grappled hard with his foe, the two of them struggling like titans. Their bellows of rage filled the caverns. Lord Fear twisted like a snake, freeing one of his arms from Treguard's grip,

and landed a powerful blow. Treguard tasted blood in his beard and laughed, revelling in his battle fury. His own punch sent Fear reeling back, metal helm ringing against the rock like a bell. He came springing back, spitting fury like a tongue of fire, and again they ran against each other like raging bulls.

Sam and the others came up hesitantly, awestruck at the sight of such violence. Earlier, Sam had wondered at how normal Treguard had looked, considering his claims to be the magical Lord of Nightmare. He'd struck her as stern and strong, but no more than mortal. And Lord Fear too, even now that he was revealed in his true guise, with the steel helm that enclosed his face like a skull, had not seemed more than sinister. But when Sam saw the epic struggle in which the two foes were engaged, she thought she began to understand. They were actually wild elemental forces, both of them - much more than human. They only wore the outer semblance of mortals. The staggering force of their struggle, the



strength of their blows, and the savagery of their hatred for each other, were all beyond human imagining. Even Aesandre shrank back, hand pressed to her mouth, aghast at the sight.

And Sam could see something else, too. They were evenly matched. Treguard and Lord Fear might remain locked in mortal combat for all eternity . . .

Unless someone found a way to break the deadlock.

Even as she thought this, a shape brushed past her. It was Gobble. He crouched close to the battle, barking furiously. Sam was about to pull him back out of harm's way. Then, seeing a lull in the struggle as Treguard and Fear grappled in agonized silence, the hound suddenly darted forward and seized Lord Fear's sceptre in his jaws.

Lord Fear saw this and half turned. He had time to open his mouth before Treguard's fist smashed into him. Fear staggered and fell.

Gobble went bounding off across the cavern. Lord Fear looked up, and Sam

was amazed to see a look of terror in his terrible eyes. As Gobble reached the brink of the precipice, he let go of the sceptre. It dropped out of sight into the chasm.

'No!' screamed Fear.

The sceptre must have struck against the side of the chasm. There was a thunderous rumble, and greenish sparks belched up from the depths. At the same time, an uncanny glow enveloped Lord Fear. He started to get to his feet, but the glow spread, becoming a blossom of cold lime-coloured flame. Fear let out a long inhuman howl of anguish which gradually trailed away into an endless distance.

The flame faded. There was no longer any trace of the evil Lord Fear.

'Well, Aesandre,' said Treguard, retrieving his sword, 'do you want to go the way of your unlamented accomplice?'

Aesandre crouched against the bronze door like a cornered beast. 'Not I,' she said, eyes icy with hate. 'You have the upper hand. For now . . .'

Her hands wove a spell, and she disappeared in a flurry of shivering white snowflakes.

'So, that only leaves Skarkill. . .' said Treguard, looking around.

But Skarkill was in no shape to cause further mischief. He was sprinting across the cavern, moaning and yelping. Gobble chased after him, hot on his heels, and occasionally caught up to tear a chunk out of ragged trousers and raw flesh.

'Poor old Skarkill,' remarked Pickle. 'He has a rather hounded look, don't you think, Master?'

Treguard took them back to the door and showed them the path home. The storm had passed over. Fat water-droplets splattered from the drooping leaves. The night was hushed and full of a warm earthy scent.

'It's easier to leave Nightmare than to find your way here,' he told them. 'And I'm heartily glad you did come. Without you three youngsters, tonight

might have had a very different outcome. Pickle and I thank you - and I'm sure the dragon would, too, if he were here.'

'Can we come back?' asked Pippa.

'You will not be able to find the gate again,' said Treguard. 'But there are other ways into Knightmare. Imagination is the key, and dream the pathway. Perhaps that, Pippa, is why you were able to sense things that your young friends could not.'

'Do we need the candle?' asked Jimmy, holding it up.

Treguard smiled. 'Not to leave here. Just set out with bold steps and do not look back. The path will then lead you safely home.'

As they went, there was a leathery beating from behind them. It was up in the air above the castle, and each beat brought a downdraught of warm cindery wind.

'What's that?' said Jimmy. 'Has the dragon woken up?'

'Don't look back,' Sam cautioned. 'He told us not to.'

Sam and her brother kept their eyes

fixed firmly on the path, but Pippa could not contain herself. She turned her head to face back along the path, just for the briefest moment. And the others heard her give a little gasp of surprise and delight.

The next moment they were on the pavement. On the other side of the road, people sat chatting at the tables outside the pub. Home was just around the corner. Between the infant school and the block of flats, there was no sign that there had ever been a gate that led on to a mysterious hidden pathway.

Pippa wore a broad smile. 'What is it?' Sam asked her. 'What happened when you looked back?'

'I don't think I'll say,' said Pippa thoughtfully. 'After all, everybody ought to have *one* secret.'

THE END

THE KNIGHTMARE CHALLENGE

THE QUEST FOR THE DRAGON'S EGG



Treguard stands ahead of you in the Great Hall of Nightmare Castle. His strong arms are folded across his burly chest in an attitude of impatience. You hurry forward, attempting a courtly bow to the Dungeonmaster, but instead your nervousness causes you to very nearly stumble into him.

Treguard frowns, but he knows that the eagerness of youth can sometimes make one seem awkward. He was once a young knight himself, after all, a long time ago. He extends his hand and helps you to your feet.

'The path of chivalry is long and arduous,' he says. 'Now you must prove yourself worthy.'

Pickle dances from the long shadows by the hearth, bearing the Helm of Justice for you to wear. As you settle it on to your brow, you hear Treguard's words echo tinnily: Tour quest will take you through city, ocean and labyrinth. You must seek the fabled lair of the Earth Dragon and bring back one of its eggs. Be less clumsy than you

were a moment ago: if you awaken the dragon, it may take umbrage!

Arm yourself with a pencil and paper for recording any items or spells that you acquire on your adventure. You will also need a six-sided die. After reading the rules below, you will be ready to start.

THE RULES OF THE QUEST

1. Your Life Force Status has three levels: GREEN, AMBER and RED. You begin the adventure on GREEN, since you are as yet unwounded. During the adventure it is possible for you to gain or lose Life Force levels. For instance, if you were on AMBER and were told to lose a level, your Life Force Status would change to RED. Once you are on RED, any further loss of Life Force will kill you.

2. You also have Skills. You start with one Skill, chosen from the list given below:



ACROBATICS SEAMANSHIP THIEVERY
FISTICUFFS SWIMMING TRADING
GAMBLING SWORDPLAY

Make a note of the Skill you choose, as it will affect the options available to you.

3. Keep a note of items as you come across them. You can carry up to five items at a time. If you find an item that you think might come in handy but you already have five other items, you will have to discard one.

4. There are some occasions when you may get the chance to purchase things. For this reason it is worth keeping any money you find. You can carry up to fifty gold coins in your money-pouch and this still counts as just one item.

5. It is possible you might learn spells during your adventure. Each spell can be used only once. Keep a note of any spells you acquire.

6. You can eat an item of food at any entry marked with an asterisk (*). Each item of food you eat when wounded increases your Life Force by one level.

NOW BEGIN!

1

It is time for you to set out. If you have chosen the SWORDPLAY Skill, Treguard arms you with a sword but no money. If you have taken any other Skill except for THIEVERY, he gives you a purse containing twenty-five gold pieces. If you chose THIEVERY, however, he gives you a black look and a purse containing only ten gold pieces, muttering: 'No doubt you'll find some disreputable way to add to this sum.'

Treguard draws a velvet curtain aside. Beyond lies an archway filled with flat black shadow. Without needing to ask, you know that it is a magical portal that will take you to the first port of call on your quest. Just as you are about to step through, however, Pickle says: 'Surely you ought to give at least a smattering of advice, master?'

Treguard stokes his beard. 'Hmm,' he says. Then: 'My impish attendant suggests you'd take advice. But perhaps you'd rather have something more substantial?'

If you ask for advice, turn to **52**

If you ask for rations, turn to **61**
If you ask for weaponry, turn to **70**

***2**

You are going to have to find some other way of making the money you need. You spend several days racking your brains, but no plan occurs to you.

It is almost the time set for the *Pen-dragon's* departure when, strolling along a lane some distance from the seafront, you hear someone calling from a narrow window: '*Succurremihi!*'

If you decide to investigate, turn to **6**
If not, turn to **12**

***3**

'Captain Tarbuck is a busy man!' the bo'sun tells you once you have announced yourself. 'Even now, he is poring over the charts for our coming voyage - a daring venture that takes us past the Draconis Isles.'

'How can I arrange passage on the ship?' you ask him.

He gives a great guffaw as he looks

you up and down. 'As to that - well, maybe you have skills that'll be handy on a long sea voyage? If so, you might travel for free. More likely you'll have to pay twoscore gilders for a berth.'

After ascertaining that you have a week before the *Pendragon* sails, you go ashore and start giving some thought to how you'll pay for the journey. Of course, you may be confident that you have the expertise necessary to join the ship's company. But, to be on the safe side, perhaps you should find gainful employment in the meantime.

If you have the FISTICUFFS Skill, turn to **78**

If you have the THIEVERY Skill, turn to **95**

If you have the GAMBLING Skill, turn to **87**

Otherwise, turn to **2**

4

In a trice, your sword's point is at the wretch's throat. He gulps, transfixed in horror as he stares at the blade. But

you have no intention of harming him. Instead, you cut his purse strings and hook the purse from his belt on the end of your sword. Glancing inside, you find not only the money he stole off you, but an additional six gold pieces into the bargain.



'Wh-what are you going to do with me?' stammers the man they call 'Sly Hands.

'I'll spare your life,' you say with a menacing grin. 'After all, I have your riches . . .' you toss the money-pouch in your hand'... and your britches.' With a flourish of your blade, you slice through his belt and he is forced to make an undignified retreat clutching his trousers.

You can now return to the docks and see about journeying on the *Pendragon*.

Turn to **11**

***5**

'Simplicity itself!' she cries gaily. Before you can stop her, she has thrown up her hands and is weaving a weird spell:

'Hocus pocus,

Out offocus,

Whisk us to another locus.'

The scene around you blurs. It is like looking through deep green water, murky and turbid. The sailors turn to stare at you, and from the smudged expressions of astonishment you deduce that something uncanny is happening. Then the colours of the scene run together, in the manner of a painting in the rain, and there is an indeterminate period of complete darkness.

Your next awareness is of cold dimly-lit surroundings. Stone vaulting takes shape out of the gloom. You are in a castle.

At the far end of an oak table, sitting in the warming red glow of a log fire, sit Treguard and Pickle, chatting as they sip coffee and eat sandwiches. Noticing you, Treguard is suddenly startled. He gets to his feet, wiping his mouth on a

napkin. 'What... er, what are you doing back here?' he starts. Then, gathering his customary composure, he goes on: 'You seem to have placed your fate in clumsy hands.'

Beside you, Vestella looks sheepish. 'Oh-er, got it wrong again . . .' she mumbles.

There is nothing for it but to start again.

Go back to **1**

6

You enter the building and climb the stairs, which bring you to a room where magical chalk marks adorn the polished floorboards. There is the scent of incense from a copper bowl, beside which stands a tall magisterial figure with striking red streaks in his white hair. You recognize him by reputation: Hordriss the Confuser, a great wizard.

'*Cave!*' he says as you enter. At first you don't know what he means, then you understand it was Latin - 'Beware.' You glance- at the other end of the room, where you now behold a

crouching demon, flanks like steaming blood, glitters of firelight in its eyes. It is pawing at the chalked outlines of a star-shaped design which appears to confine it as an ordinary creature would be confined by a cage.

'*Hic diabolus* ... I beg your pardon: this demon,' says Hordriss to you, 'has manifested in answer to a spell of mine, but refuses to depart until I can dismiss it in the name of its monarch. But the only clue it would give me is "*res dana*" which is dog-latin for "given things" or somesuch.'

You are about to make a suggestion when something occurs to you: 'What happens if we get the answer wrong?'

'Don't you know anything?' Hordriss snorts. 'The demon would then break out of the pentacle and kill us, of course!'

If, in the light of this, you decide to leave without making a suggestion, turn to **12**

If you think you know the name of the demon's monarch, turn to **16**

After many days' sailing you reach the distant and fabulous Draconis Isles. The captain comes to stand beside you at the rail and points to an island with a steep jungle-covered mountain rising from the centre. 'That is rumoured to be the home of the Earth Dragon,' he says. 'I have no wish to visit it, in view of the dragon's fearsome reputation. But I can set you ashore here, and then collect you in a few days when we have been to some of the other islands and gathered the gems that are said to be strewn on the beaches there.'

You agree to be put ashore. Many of the sailors have become your bosom cronies by now, and they cluster round to shake your hand and wish you good luck. But you notice a tear in the eye of the cook, an old fellow of kindly disposition. 'So young . . . So young . . .' he weeps as he grips your hand. It is a heartfelt but hardly encouraging sentiment.

After watching the *Pendragon* sail off, you turn your attention to the island.

Turn to **91**

8

Bare hands against a sword? You must be joking. Unfortunately Quemada is not joking, for all that he has is a broad smile stamped on his lips and a sparkle in his eye. He proceeds to cut out your liver — and he takes an unnecessarily long time over it, too.

Your adventure ends here.

9

Concealed by the magic of the spell, you move softly past the sleeping dragon. Each intake of breath into those massive nostrils is like a gust of wind that nearly sucks you off your feet, but because of the spell it doesn't even smell you.

In the glow of lava-light, you see a group of hard round objects. Can they be the eggs of the dragon?

Turn to **39**

10

You are stranded on the island. You may indeed have succeeded in your quest, but to what purpose? Instead of glory, your



future holds only the prospect of months or years here on this deserted shore. You can forage for coconuts and berries, and you soon find a freshwater stream, but your heart remains bleak. You have failed.

***11**

The first sailors are just coming ashore as you reach the gangplank. By eavesdropping on their chatter, you soon learn that the *Pendragon* is bound for the Draconis Islands. When you enquire as to the cost of passage, however, you are greeted by a jeer: 'Behold our fine ship. Does such a poor waif as you have the money to hire a berth aboard her? Hardly!'

If you persist in going aboard to see the captain, turn to **3**

If you decide you'd better find a bit more money first, you can now either go into the tavern (turn to **21**) or else look around for employment (turn to **69**)

***12**

On your way back to the docks, you see a jester who is entertaining people by juggling some wooden skittles.

If you want to pause a while and listen to his patter, turn to **32**

If you are anxious to get to the *Pendragon* before she sets sail, turn to **60**

13

With a great cry of 'You scoundrels!' you hurl yourself at the two beggars.

They react in plain astonishment. One drops the cooking pot, and the cat takes advantage of this to rake its claws across his face. The other, distracted, releases the woman's arms and so gets the shaft of her broom across his thin shoulders.

After the initial surprise, the beggars take up cudgels and a half-hearted

struggle ensues. You eventually succeed in driving them off, suffering the loss of one Life Force grade in the process. (Exception: if you have the SWORDPLAY or FISTICUFFS Skill, you lose no Life Force.) As they run, one of them bleats, 'It isn't fair! What are we supposed to do about lunch now?'

The woman is out of breath after her exertions with the broom.

If you wait to speak to her, turn to **33**

If you hurry to board the *Pendragon*, turn to **23**

14

You shouldn't carry a sword if you don't know how to use it properly. Within moments you have wounded Hands seriously. He slumps down in a spreading pool of blood. Townsfolk, seeing this, raise a hue and cry and you are pursued through the narrow streets until cornered near a warehouse.

'The pickpocket's dead . . .' you hear someone murmur as the local militia arrest you.

'Murderer!' somebody else shouts.

One of the militiamen sneers as he roughly pins your hands behind your back, 'Hear that? You'll be swinging on the end of a rope by tomorrow morning.'

And indeed you are.

***15**

'A couple of things, actually,' she replies in answer to your query. 'First, there's an island inhabited by short spindly critters with milk-white skin. These look gormless, but are actually flesh-eating goblins called Yumboes. Secondly, on the island of Blepharos there are two tribes: one with golden eyes, the other with green. One bunch or the other is prone to telling lies . . . can't remember which is which, though.' She pulls out a grimoire and leafs through it, then scratches her head. 'No, it isn't in here. Oh well.'

Note down the code-word OCULAR and then turn to **81**

16

Well, what do you think? Is it:

'Aesandra of Winteria': turn to **26**

'Lord Fear': turn to **36**

The Gatemaster': turn to **46**

17

The *Pendragon* sails on for many days and nights. Fresh water is rationed, and squabbles break out among the crew, many of whom fear the ship is in danger of sailing right off the edge of the world.

Finally that is exactly what happens. The ship is caught in an unbreakable current which carries you to the edge of the world. Here, the sea spills away eternally into a limitless star-filled gulf of night. Screams are futile, lost in the roar of water as you are borne over the brink.

You should have remembered this is the Middle Ages, before Columbus. The world is still flat.

18

Good thinking - you got in a fine sucker punch, but you wouldn't have much chance of taking on a good swordsman

unarmed. Racing out of the tavern, you ignore Quemada's shout of 'Come back here and fight, you lubber!'

The best place to flee is straight towards the gangplank of the *Pendragon*. Behind you, Quemada emerges from the tavern and considers pursuing you aboard, then apparently thinks better of it. As you glance back, you see him make a crude gesture and then turn on his heel and stalk off.

Turn to **3**

19

Your boot crunches on a patch of gravel. The sound echoes ominously in the cavernous shaft.

If you have a lucky charm, turn to **49**

If not, turn to **58**

***20**

You do not have to wait very long for the *Pendragon* to pick you up. 'You have succeeded in your quest, then,' says Captain Tarbuck, with a note of surprise in his usually tranquil voice. 'In all candour, I

had expected to find nothing more left of you than a charred corpse.'

You smile, reflecting that more people would be capable of such heroic acts as yours, if only they could be rid of their doubts and fears.

The *Pendragon* at last sails back into port and, thanking the crew for their help, you hurry along the quayside to the spot where you first arrived.

Turn to **40**



21

Captain Quemada has a friendly enough manner, but you cannot help thinking there is something a bit sinister about him. Or, if not sinister, at least roguish. Perhaps it is just the stiletto strapped to his boot and the longsword propped against his stool, but he strikes you as

a fellow who gets to see more than a dash of the seedy side of life.

As you gingerly take a stool at his table, he calls over the barmaid with a full tankard for you. 'Well,' he says, 'what brings you to these parts, young traveller?'

If you ask him how to go about finding a dragon's egg, turn to **27**

If you ask him about getting passage aboard a ship, turn to **37**

If you decide against talking to him, turn to **47**

22

Roll a die to discover whether your gambling paid off:

If you roll a 1, you lose your stake.

If you roll 2-3, you hold on to your stake but make no gains.

If you roll 4 or more, you double your stake.

You can gamble again until you either decide that you have won enough (turn to **12**) or until you cannot afford to continue (in which case turn to **2**)

23

Captain Tarbuck is a short man with an air of quiet authority. He listens to your request with a stern gaze that is belied by the half-smile that flickers on his lips.

'Do you have handy seafaring skills, or such martial prowess as might aid us against pirates?' he enquires. If so, you are welcome to join the ship's company and may sail with us for nothing. Otherwise, you must pay a fee for your passage: forty gold pieces.'

If you have the SWORDPLAY or SEAMANSHIP Skill, you can travel free of charge. You can also do this if you possess a compass, since such an item will be useful to Captain Tarbuck. Otherwise, if you can pay the forty gold pieces, cross off this sum.

If your passage has now been arranged, turn to **44**

If you do not have either Skill, the compass or enough money, then you are turned off the *Pendragon* and your adventure ends here.

24

You administer a sound pummelling to teach Sylvester Hands the error of his ways. As he cowers, eyes already puffing up and blood running freely from nose and mouth, you snatch away his money-pouch. It contains the money he stole from you, and an additional six gold pieces to boot.

'Mercy . . .' whimpers Hands.

He is so despicable that you give him just one more solid punch before striding back to the docks to see about signing on aboard the *Pendragon*.

Turn to **11**

25

The crew grumble. They had been looking forward to the mouthwatering selection of coconuts, dates and crabs that they could have got from the island.

'Bear in mind that our young adventurer friend here has travelled widely,' the first mate tells them. 'Prudent advice of such quality is hard to come by.'

As you sail on, one of the crew fixes

you with a surly frown. 'What's prudent advice to one person might seem like lily-livered timidity to another,' he remarks over his shoulder to the other sailors.

If you decide to teach the fellow a lesson, turn to **45**

If you let the remark pass, turn to **90**

26

The demon gives a howl, turns icy blue, and vanishes in a puff of snowflakes.

'Whew!' says Hordriss, mopping his brow. 'Which is to say . . . um, I mean, very well done, that adventurer. Top marks.'

'Glad to be of help,' you say, turning to go.

'No, wait,' says Hordriss. 'First let me reward you.' He lifts a book from his desk and touches it to your forehead. Suddenly your mind is filled with a succession of marvellous facts, all instilled there by a process much less time-consuming than ordinary learning. You can now add one of these Skills (your choice) to the one you have

already: FISTICUFFS, SEAMANSHIP or TRADING.

Nor is that all. He also offers to teach you a spell by the same method. You can learn either the SNEAK or WALK ON WATER spell. Once you have chosen the one you want, he touches you with the book and - lo and behold! - you acquire the knowledge to cast the spell once.

'It beats swotting,' you tell Hordriss with a smile. Then, taking your leave of him, you return to the street.

Turn to **12**

27

Make a note of the codeword CROSSBONES.

Quemada scratches his jaw. 'Hmm, it's a dragon's egg you're after, is it? Such things are rare and highly prized - especially by dragons. But it is said that a dragon sleeps under the volcanic peak of one of the Draconis Isles. I wish you luck if it's there you're bound.'

Thanking him for the drink and the

advice, you take your leave and saunter up the gangplank of the *Pendragon*.

Turn to **3**



28

As your eyes adjust to the dim reddish glow, you see shapes moving up and down the hollow middle of the volcano. Peering intently as one drifts near to you, you see it is a bizarre creature that might be some kind of bat, insect, bird or flying lizard - or perhaps something else entirely. In fact it reminds you of nothing quite so much as an angel fish, by reason of its eerie grace and fragile beauty. It has huge thin wings, frilled and shimmering with many colours, and a large pale head with no torso to speak of. Though humanlike in general features, it has only vestigial eyes.

Catching sight of you, its wide mouth gapes and it swims closer on the thermal currents rising from below. You realize you must deal with it before it draws attention to you and possibly alerts the dragon sleeping under the mountain.

If you try speaking to the odd creature, turn to **38**

If you have a SNEAK spell and want to use it, turn to **48**

If you have a Golden Malicious apple and decide to make use of it now, turn to **57**

29

Hardly daring to breathe, you tiptoe past the dragon. Each step involves pains-taking care, since you must avoid the treacherous patches of gravel that might slide under your weight. Several times the dragon stirs in its sleep, dreaming of whatever it is that dragons dream, and your whole body locks rigid in fright. You can hear your heartbeat thumping in your ears, but luckily the dragon does not hear it.

At last, having warily moved around

the great wheezing worm, you spy a group of hard round objects in the molten half-light. The dragon's eggs!

Turn to **39**

30

The spell lets you move across water as easily as on dry land. Reciting it, you immediately race straight out towards Quemada's galley.

'Into the rowboat!' screams Quemada at his men. 'Give chase!'

Scrambling madly, they start to row back from the shore. By the time they are only halfway though, you have already reached the galley.

The slaves look up from the oars to which they are chained. 'Free us,' they say, 'and we'll help you escape from the pirate chief.'

'We hate him as much as you do,' says one man.

'More!' puts in another, with feeling.

Captain Quemada looks up with an expression of amazement and rage as he sees his galley weighing anchor and moving out to sea. He stands up in the

rowboat and shakes his fist at you. 'Come back here!' he snarls. 'As Davy Jones is my witness, I'll see you keelhauled for this. I'll see you flayed alive!'

'Not if I see you first,' you shout back. This raises a great laugh among the newly-free slaves that leaves Quemada seething even more.

On arriving back at port, you turn the ship over to the former slaves. 'You were forced to labour for Quemada all that time; now sail her for yourselves,' you tell them. Then you return along the quayside to the spot where you first arrived.

Turn to **40**

31

You select a plump, minever-coated trader who has an honest face. 'On the subject of adventure,' he says, 'I can readily advise you that you must first purchase supplies. They are essential to any voyage. By good fortune, my cousin runs a ship's chandlers just a few streets from here. I should be glad to show you the way.'

If you go with him to the ship's chandlers, turn to **41**

If you enter the tavern to see the man who called to you, turn to **21**

If you now want to seek a berth aboard the *Pendragon*, turn to **11**

***32**

As he juggles the skittles, he sings a little ditty:

'Oh, a life on the ocean waves,

A life on the ocean waves,

Is fine for sailors and even for knights

But doesn't appeal to us knaves!'

Suddenly he stops juggling, lays his skittles down, and singles you out of the crowd. He fixes you with a big grin, and cries, 'Ah, here's a likely customer! Yes, you there in the silly tin hat...' and steps over towards you, everyone turns to look. Is he going to use you as the butt of a joke, or perhaps perform some tomfool conjuring trick like pulling fifteen feet of silk scarves out of your nose? You cringe with embarrassment at the thought of it.

If you sidle away through the crowd, turn to **60**

If you stay to see what he's going to do, turn to **79**

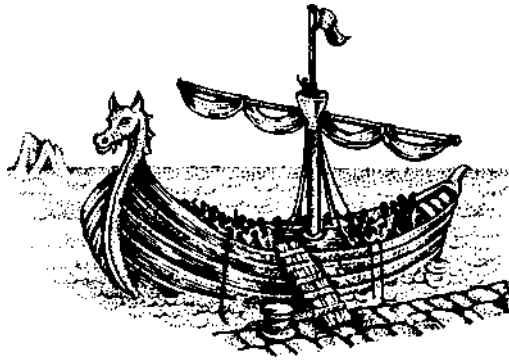
33

'By jiggery, that were grand!' says the woman when she has got her breath back. 'Did you see them monkeys flee, Pussillanimous?' She picks up the cat and strokes it, provoking a deep contented purr.

'Glad to be of help,' you say. 'Now, if you'll excuse me, I've a ship to catch . . .'

'Hang about,' she says, grabbing your arm. 'I can't let you run off wi'out a reward, can I? You saved my poor old familiar from ending up in the stew, after all. Here you go.' She takes a large apple from her apron and polishes it on her sleeve before handing it to you. 'It's a Golden Malicious,' she explains. 'Don't go eating it, mind. Give it to someone or something that you want to get rid of.'

'Is it poisonous?' you say, staring at the apple aghast. You doubt if Treguard would consider any use of poison to be within the strictures of chivalry.



'Nay, just a mite . . . tricky, like. You know: *magical*.'

Remembering your quest, you pocket the Golden Malicious apple and rush back to the main street. Your heart almost leaps into your mouth when you see the *Pendragon*, her sails now billowing in the wind, moving out from the dock towards the harbour mouth. 'Oh no!' you say. 'I've missed the boat.'

If you have the SWIMMING Skill, turn to **43**

If you have the ACROBATICS Skill, turn to **53**

If you have neither of these, turn to **62**

34

Rolling in the filth-strewn gutter, you match Hands blow for blow. Lose one

Life Force grade. In the end, Hands doesn't have the stomach for much punishment. As you tear his purse strings, he gives a whimper of pain and runs off. You open the purse and discover not only your missing money, but an additional six gold pieces as well. You hadn't bargained on making a profit, but it is nonetheless welcome.

Strolling back to the waterfront, you seek a berth aboard the *Pendragon*.

Turn to **11**

35

The moment the rowboat touches the beach, the strange white creatures abandon their pretence at lassitude. Running down the shore, they hurl rocks and open their lips to howl, revealing glistening red maws.

'They are Yumboes!' gasps the bo'sun. 'How could I have forgotten the old African folktales of these evil devils, goblins that care only for human flesh?'

There is a frantic effort to get the rowboat back into the water. Along with a couple of others, you try to

hold the Yumboes off until then.

They chew at you with their needle-pointed teeth and slash your flesh with flint knives. Lose two Life Force grades - unless you have either FISTICUFFS (in which case lose only one Life Force) or SWORDPLAY (in which case lose none).

Assuming you survive, you pile back into the rowboat and flee to safety aboard the *Pendragon*. 'A close call,' says the captain. 'We sail on.'

Turn to **90**

36

The demon is obviously disturbed by the mention of such a powerful entity of darkness. Even though you guess now that you probably gave the wrong answer, at least it has the desired effect of causing the demon to vanish. However, it gives vent to a great blast of fetid breath as it does. To your surprise, despite the outwardly fiery appearance of the beast, its breath is formed of icy flurries which bite into your flesh. Lose one Life Force grade owing to the extreme cold. If you survive,

the demon then disappears.

'You deserve a reward,' says Hordriss, brushing the snowflakes out of his beard. Taking a book from his desk, he touches it to your forehead and instantly your brain is filled with new knowledge, instilled there by a process much less time-consuming than ordinary study. You can now add either the FISTICUFFS, SEAMANSHIP or TRADING Skill (your choice) to the one you already have.

Thanking Hordriss, you take your leave of him and return to the street.

Turn to **12**

37

He seems suddenly disinterested, as though he had been hoping for juicier titbits in his conversation with you. 'Sea voyages are always expensive,' he says, getting up from the table and buckling on his sword. 'See the *Pendragon*, just tying up at the quay over there? I believe the going rate for a berth is thirty or forty gold pieces. Of course, maybe you have special talents that would induce her

captain to take you on as part of the crew . . . '

Quemada leaves, his purposeful stride suggesting he has urgent business. You are reminded of your own quest. Draining your flagon, you hurry out to the dock and make your way up the gangplank of the *Pendragon*.

Turn to **3**

38

It speaks with a high thin voice, like wind souging in a bed of reeds. 'The distance from one side of the crater to the other is one tenth of a league,' it tells you. 'I've just flown right across at a speed of three leagues an hour. How fast would I have to fly back so that my average speed for both flights was six leagues an hour?'

How vexing. It *would* have to be one of those creatures that enjoy puzzles. A good fight might have got things over quicker, but now you are going to have to answer its conundrum before it decides to attract attention to you.

What will you say?

'Fly back at nine leagues an hour.'

Turn to **67**

'Fly back at twelve leagues an hour.'

Turn to **76**

or 'It's not possible.' Turn to **85**

39

The eggs - if that really is what they are - look like round boulders the size of coconuts. Most are plain grey in colour, but a few are covered in gold speckling.

You try lifting one. It is so heavy that it counts as three items. That means you will only be able to carry one of these eggs. Decide whether you will take a plain grey one or one with gold speckles, and make a note of this.

Then, your quest nearly at an end, you return up the shaft and make your way back to the shore.

Turn to **68**

40

After a moment of darkness and disorientation, you are back in Nightmare Castle. Treguard comes towards

you, hands stretched out to receive the egg. 'Aha, you have returned,' he says. 'Let me see what you have achieved, young adventurer.'

If you hand Treguard a plain grey egg, turn to **50**

If you give him an egg with golden speckling, turn to **97**

If you have no egg to give him, turn to **96**



41

He takes you to the shop of his cousin, Julius Scaramonger. The shop is crammed with merchandise from all corners of the world. There are curved swords of finest Damascus steel, treasure maps, books of ancient lore, and any number of charms and talismans. You might spend forever

browsing here, but the thrill of adventure spurs you on until you have selected just a few items that you might really need.

Julius Scaramonger looks you up and down, narrowing his eyes disdainfully as he spots your meagre money-pouch. Then, taking a piece of chalk, he sets a price for each of the items:

Sword.....	20 gold pieces
Ship's biscuit (food)	2 gold pieces
Beef jerky (food).....	3 gold pieces
Compass.....	22 gold pieces
Lucky charm.....	5 gold pieces

If you have the TRADING Skill, you can reduce these costs, after a bout of fierce haggling, to:

Sword.....	16 gold pieces
Biscuit.....	1 gold piece
Beef jerky.....	2 gold pieces
Compass.....	16 gold pieces
Lucky charm.....	4 gold pieces

Note down the purchases you make, if any, and then return to the quayside by turning to **51**

42

You are on a quayside. The gentle sea breeze does little to disperse the powerful smells of salt, tar, fish and human sweat. All around you bustle hordes of sailors and longshoremen, busily loading ships or unpacking wares ready to take to market.

You glance up as the sun is blotted out for a moment. You see the tall furled sails of a large merchant ship being brought in to dock. Her prow is carved in the shape of a dragon. Your gaze travels down to the name painted at the bows: the *Pendragon*. Even as you watch, mooring lines are tossed over to the quay and longshoremen secure them. A gangplank is lowered.

You are about to step over to the ship when a loud 'Psst!' attracts your attention. Sitting in the shaded window of a dockside tavern, you see a swarthy fellow wearing a red silk shirt and black pantaloons. He has a gold ring in his ear, and his teeth flash as he gives you a grin. 'Don't waste your time on merchantmen,' he calls out. 'If it's adventure

you're after, Captain Quemada is your man.'

If you go over to the *Pendragon*, turn to **11**

If you approach the stranger who's called to you, turn to **21**

If you ask a passer-by for advice, turn to **31**

43

Running to the quayside, you dive in and swim after the *Pendragon* with powerful strokes. The sailors see you and cheer you on, admiring your tenacity. Taking hold of the rope that is flung down to you, you climb aboard and demand to see the captain.

Captain Tarbuck proves to be a short stocky man with a smile that suggests thoughtfulness and a keen intelligence. He looks at you, standing on the deck in your sopping wet clothes, and listens to your request to sail aboard the *Pendragon*.

'If you have useful skills, you are welcome to join the ship's company and may sail with us for nothing,' he says after a

moment's deliberation. 'Otherwise, you must pay a fee of forty gold pieces for your passage.'

If you have the SWORDPLAY or SEAMANSHIP Skill, you can travel free of charge. You can also do this if you possess a compass, since such an item will be useful to Captain Tarbuck. Otherwise, if you can pay the forty gold pieces, cross off this sum.

If your passage has now been arranged, turn to **44**

If you don't have forty gold pieces, but do have at least thirty, turn to **71**

If you have less than thirty gold pieces to pay for your passage, you are turned off the ship and your adventure ends right here.

***44**

Only one day out from port, you spot a raft in the distance. It looks to be from a shipwreck,' states Captain Tarbuck as you draw nearer. You can see a solitary figure aboard the raft - a slim waif-like young woman in the tattered and salt-stained gown of a sorceress.

If you recommend picking up the shipwreck survivor, turn to **72**

If you think it would be better to sail away and leave her, turn to **81**

45

If you have the SWORDPLAY or FISTICUFFS Skill, turn to **63**

If not, turn to **73**

46

The demon utters *a* hideous bellow of rage and breaks out of the magical barrier that held it trapped. Hordriss unleashes his best spells in an effort to drive it away, but not before it has raked you with its claws, causing the loss of two Life Force grades.

If you survive, you can only watch aghast as Hordriss forces the eerie creature back to the dimension from which it came. Once it has finally faded, leaving behind only a smoky odour in the air, Hordriss slumps at his desk, exhausted. You decide to go before he

conjures up anything more dangerous.
Or even as dangerous, come to that.

Turn to **12**



47

'Wait,' he says, grabbing your arm as you start to rise. 'You're not going to turn your back on me after I bought you a drink . . . ?' The smile on his face has frozen into a hard, menacing expression now. You glance at his other hand. It rests on the pearl-studded pommel of his sword.

If you have the **ACROBATICS** Skill,
turn to **56**

If you apologize and pay for the drink (it costs one gold piece), cross off the money and then go to seek passage aboard the *Pendragon* by turning to **3**

Otherwise, you can fight him (turn to **66**) or else run for it (turn to **75**)

48

The spell makes you impossible to hear and even more difficult to see. You continue down to the bottom of the crater without attracting the attention of the bizarre flying creatures. You are now in the heart of the dormant volcano. Lava gleams up through cracks in the rock, but the ground is not too hot to walk on. You start out towards a group of rocks, and then you go rigid in sudden shock. Ahead of you, coiled slumbering over a fissure, lies the Earth Dragon. Worse, your **SNEAK** spell has worn off!

Turn to **93**

49

The patch of gravel crunches loudly under your weight. At once, every muscle in your body locks rigid in alarm. You can hear your heartbeat thumping in your ears.

The dragon gives a great snore like the sound of a thunderbolt splitting an oak tree.

It stirs in its sleep, dreaming of whatever it is that dragons dream.

Then it flicks its tail lazily, turns over, and goes back to sleep . . .

Phew! You wipe the sweat out of your eyes and go on. Then you notice a group of hard round objects in the flickering volcano-light. They must be the dragon's eggs.

Turn to **39**

50

Treguard looks the object over in his hands and frowns. 'Why, this is but a simple rock,' he says. Shaking his head sadly, he puts the rock down on a table and walks off.

Pickle skips lightly over and pushes a book into your hands. It is the *Dragon-Watcher's Book of Egg Identification*. 'When you've had a look at that,' he says chirpily, 'maybe you'd like to have another go . . . ?'

You give a great sigh. There's nothing

for it but to turn back to the start and try again.

***51**

On the way back to the docks, you are stopped and asked for directions by a furtive bearded man in ragged robes. He gives a big grin when you finally manage to point him the right way, showing the glint of a gold tooth as he does.

It is only as you are stepping out on to the quayside again that you remember where you saw the man's face before. It was on a 'wanted' poster in the foyer of Knightmare Castle. He is Sylvester Hands, the notorious thief and rogue.

If you have any money left in your pouch, you now discover that half of it is missing! (for example, if you had nine gold pieces then you now have only five - because you round fractions up in your favour). Angrily you try chasing after Sylvester Hands to get your money back. Roll a die: on a roll of 1 or 2, you manage to find him in the crowd. On a roll of 3 or more, you've lost him.

If you catch up with Hands, you can



either assault him (turn to **80**) or else try to steal your money back (turn to **88**)

If you don't catch up with him, you dejectedly return to the docks to seek passage aboard the *Pendragon* - turn to **11**

52

'Very well,' says Treguard. 'You are wise to set great store by information. It is a rash adventurer who embarks on a quest without first finding out what must be done. The Earth Dragon's eggs may be distinguished by their gold speckling. The Dragon itself is said to dwell in a volcanic cavern somewhere among the Draconis Islands. You will need to find a ship to take you there. But I warn you that hiring passage on a ship costs quite a lot of money - more than you have at present, certainly.'

Nodding, you turn and step into the blackness of the magic portal. Involuntarily, fearing the dark, you close your eyes. A moment of coldness washes over you, then suddenly you feel bright

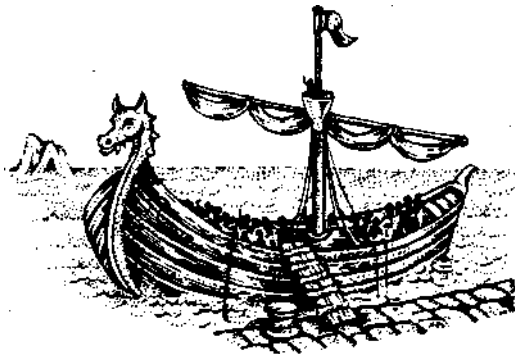
warm sunlight. You open your eyes to see where you have arrived.

Turn to **42**

53

You run out on to the quayside. Your gaze flicks across the other ships in the harbour, and instantly you assess a route out to the *Pendragon* which only the most agile acrobat could possibly take. Leaping aboard a small boat moored at the jetty, you race out along a line of fishing-boats, using them like stepping-stones to reach a larger ship which is just coming in to dock. You clamber aboard this and, ignoring the open-mouthed amazement of the sailors, proceed to scale the rigging as speedily as a spider. Straddling the gaff atop the mainsail, you detach a line and coil it up before shinning to the crow's nest. There you pause, judging the distance to the *Pendragon*. She is about twenty metres away - a little less than the length of line in your hands.

You secure the line firmly to the top of the mast as the lookout in the crow's nest



watches you, amazed. 'You're not...' he manages to say.

'I am!' you reply with a dashing grin. Taking hold of the other end of the line, you hurl yourself out from the mast. As the line goes taut, you swing powerfully around in a wide arc that carries you over the waves towards the *Pendragon*. You see that the angle of your trajectory means you will not quite reach the *Pendragon*. But no matter - you simply let go of the line as it reaches its fullest extent, and your momentum carries you on into the *Pendragon's* sails. You slide down the canvas and land nimbly on the deck, ending with a forward roll and a flourish.

The sailors give a resounding cheer at your display of skill. Captain Tarbuck is so impressed that he agrees to give you

passage free of charge. There is none can match you in the rigging,' he attests.

Turn to **44**

54

You swim on and on until you are almost sobbing with fatigue. Your arms and shoulders feel like lead weights, threatening to drag you down into the depths, but still you refuse to give in. You are forced to discard every item you possess, but finally you catch sight of an island looming out of the waves. You struggle up on to the beach and then, at last, you pass out.

Lose one Life Force grade and delete *all* the items you were carrying. (If you took the **SWORDPLAY** Skill, note also that you do not count as having it until you are able to replace your sword.) Make a note of the codeword **LITTORAL**.

Now, as you start to come round, turn to **91**

55

First you draw a dragon in the sand. By pointing, you manage to convey your

query. The islander considers it for a while then, as you point south-west, he nods.

You can stock up on food here, as the islanders have large melons for sale. Each melon you take costs one gold piece and counts as one item. Buy as many as you can carry (or can afford) and then return to the ship by turning to **83**

56

You leap up on to your stool. Before Quemada can blink, you execute a forward roll in mid air directly over his head, which carries you through the open window to land deftly on the cobbled street outside.

You decide to forestall pursuit by slipping into the network of narrow lanes leading off the dock. Now you must think of some way to make some money, as you will obviously need quite a bit more than you have at present to hire passage aboard a ship.

Turn to **2**

57

You toss the apple straight into the peculiar creature's open mouth. It gives a comical gulp and swallows the apple without thinking. A moment later, sparks shoot out of its ears, it turns bright magenta in colour, and an instant later vanishes like a bubble popping, leaving only a scent like burnt honeysuckle in the air.

The others of its species are too far off to notice you. As they frolic unawares in the warm updraughts, you continue down to the bottom of the crater. The ground is warm here, and there are lava-filled cracks in the rock here and there, but it is not too much for you to stand. You set out in search of dragon eggs, but almost at once you see a sight that makes your blood run cold despite the great heat: the Earth Dragon is coiled up not twenty paces from you. If it were to awaken, you could measure your remaining lifetime in split-seconds!

Turn to **93**

58

The sound echoes up the wide dark shaft. You freeze, not even daring to breathe, gritting your teeth, trying to keep the dragon asleep by sheer force of will.

A futile hope. Lazily, the great worm opens one eye. It looks like a pool of liquid ruby in the hot shimmering half-light. Smoke curls up from its nostrils as it lifts its head.

You turn to run. There is the sound of hard scales, like bronze, slithering across the rock. You hear a rush of hot gas—

The dragon's breath envelops you. You die without even having time to scream.

59

You follow Hands down a number of back alleys, creeping along behind him as softly as a cat. Once he even looks back over his shoulder, but you dodge to one side, crouching down so that you are hidden from view by the billowing folds of his cape. At last, as Hands pauses to slake his thirst at a water-trough, you make your move. Fingers more nimble

than his could hope to be delve into Hands' robes and neatly filch his money-pouch. He never notices a thing.

Around the corner, you inspect your haul and discover that you not only regain your lost money, you also get an additional six gold pieces into the bargain. Stolen from some other poor dupe, no doubt.

You can now go back to the docks and enquire as to passage aboard the *Pendragon*: turn to **11**

60

You can see the mast of the *Pendragon* over the closely-clustered roofs. The mainsail has already been hoisted. She is about to cast off! Quickening your pace, you push through the milling crowds, ignoring the curses and insults of those you bump into.

Just then, you hear a cry for help coming from an alleyway. There is also a sound like the snarling of a frightened cat. You turn your head to see a plump middle-aged woman struggling to retrieve her fat cat from two

beggars who have seized it - obviously with the intention of making it their lunchtime meal. One of the beggars is forcing the cat into a cooking pot while the other restrains the woman, who is trying to hit him with her broom.

If you step in to help the woman then you might miss your ship . . .

Turn to **13** if you decide to chance it

If you can't afford the time to get involved, you hasten to the quay and go aboard the *Pendragon*: turn to **23**

61

Treguard snaps his fingers, and Pickle rushes over with a large pineapple. 'Looks like a hand grenade, doesn't it?' he says. 'At least, it will do once hand grenades have been invented,' he adds when he remembers that Nightmare Castle exists in medieval times. 'Of course, you'll probably have eaten it by then . . .'

'Oh, stop wittering, Pickle,' says Treguard with a groan. The youngster is



keen to set out. Now, off you go - and acquit yourself well!

Note that you have the item of food. Then you step through the waiting portal. A sudden uncontrollable fear of the utter darkness forces you to close your eyes. There is an instant of coldness, then suddenly you feel bright warm sunlight. You open your eyes to see where you have arrived.

Turn to **42**

62

'Don't fret, love,' says the old woman, 'I've got a trick or two as might help, or my name's not Witch Hazel.'

'Yes, but what—?' you start to ask.

She sits astride her broom and gets you to do the same. You begin to suspect what's coming next. When you see the

way her cat, Pussillanimous, is clinging to her skirts in terror, you also suspect that it might be rather hair-raising.

'Ay oop!' shouts Hazel. 'Broom, broom, make with the vroom!'

You shoot up into the air like a ball from a cannon. It feels as if your stomach comes along a few seconds later. Hazel is laughing with the sheer thrill of the ride, but you feel decidedly queasy. A glance at the cat tells you that he shares your reservations.

'Which ship is it you want?' Hazel calls back over her shoulder.

'Er . . . the one with the dragon prow,' you reply without looking down.

The broom plummets out of the sky, slowing at the last possible moment to make a bumpy landing on the deck of the *Pendragon*. With a cheery wave, Hazel takes off again, leaving you to negotiate your passage with the ship's captain.

Turn to **23**

***63**

Everyone in the crew is aware of your prowess in fighting. 'Er, I meant no

disrespect,' mutters the crewman who spoke out when he sees you approaching him.

By dusk, the incident seems to have been forgotten. As everyone sits down to a meal of salt beef and pickled cabbage, the talk is once more of the great adventures that lie ahead.

Turn to **90**

64

You start by drawing a dragon in the sand. Then, pointing at the horizon, you manage to make your question clear to the islander. When you point south-east, he nods. That is the way you should sail.

You can stock up on food here, as the islanders are offering large melons for sale. Each melon you buy costs one gold piece and counts as one item. Take as many as you can carry or can afford. Your mission over, you row back to the ship.

Turn to **83**

65

You shadow Hands for a while, finally moving in as he pauses to drink from a water-trough by the side of the street. 'Oops, sorry . . . clumsy me,' you say as you stumble against him. You are gratified to feel his money-pouch in your grasp. Hands gives you a narrow-eyed look, but you are already heading away from him as fast as you can.

It is only when you get around the corner to inspect your haul that you find you have only managed to filch a pouch full of worthless pebbles. Worse, your original pouch is now missing along with whatever money you had left. A disaster! You should never have matched wits against the slyest and slimiest scoundrel in Christendom.

Rueing your bad luck, you slope back to the quayside and seek passage aboard the *Pendragon*: turn to **11**

66

If you have the SWORDPLAY Skill, turn to **84**

If you have the FISTICUFFS Skill, turn to **92**

If you have neither of these, turn to **8**

67

'Silly, silly, silly,' it chatters, drifting off towards the others of its kind. Soon they all take up the chant and, drifting out of the gloom to jeer at you, awaken the Earth Dragon below with their reedy cries.

You hear a roar and look down. A huge reptilian head peers back at you from the bowels of the volcano. You see a sheet of flame rise from its gaping mouth. The strange flying creatures issue shrill cries of panic and swoop up higher, out of reach of the blast. You are not so fortunate. The dragon's flame burns you to a cinder, and that is the end of this adventure.

68

If you have the codeword CROSSBONES, turn to **86**

If not, turn to **77**

***69**

The *Pendragon* is taking supplies on board and undergoing some minor repairs, so she is not due to sail for a week. In this time, you may be able to earn enough for your passage.

If you have the FISTICUFF Skill, turn to **78**

If you have the THIEVERY Skill, turn to **95**

If you have the GAMBLING Skill, turn to **87**

Otherwise, you'll have to think of something else; turn to **2**

70

Treguard gives you a strange look, almost of sadness. 'Weaponry, is it?' he says with a slight sigh. The last resort of the ignorant is often the first resort of the inexperienced. Still, I'll grant you what you wish . . .'

He takes you aside to where an array of fierce weapons hang upon the walls. You can select either a sword, a mace, or a morning-star to take with you. Note this down.



Treguard then takes you back to the black magic portal. Despite the weapon on your belt, you feel a stab of fear as you face the limitless darkness within it.

'Do you hesitate?' rumbles Treguard. 'Courage, *mon brave*? And with that, he gives you a shove which propels you forward into the portal.

You feel for a moment as though you are falling through ice-cold water. Imagining phantoms at the edges of vision, you screw your eyes tight shut. You open your mouth and start to cry out, but then suddenly you feel firm ground underfoot and warm sun on your face. Nervously, you open your eyes and look about.

Turn to **42**

***71**

The bo'sun takes you to one side. 'That

was a fine feat of swimming just then,' he tells you. 'Many of the men placed bets on whether or not you'd make it. I myself won a tidy sum, and it would be churlish not to split the profits with you.'

He hands you ten gold pieces, which means that you now have enough money to pay for your passage. Cross off the sum of forty gold pieces, then turn to **44**

72

Captain Tarbuck is swayed by your compassionate words. 'Aye, that is the right thing to do,' he agrees. He orders the helmsman to alter course so that the young woman can be picked up.

She climbs gratefully aboard and gives her name as Vestella, an apprentice mage. 'We had an unfortunate accident aboard the ship I was travelling on,' she says with a guilty smile. 'The hull was leaking a bit, you see, so I did a spell to bale water. I think I must have got the syllables reversed, though, because the buckets suddenly leapt up into the air and

started collecting more and more sea water and pouring it into the hold! Finally the ship sank, of course. If only I could have remembered the counterspell. . .'

After making sure that she will not try to help the *Pendragon* out with any of her magic, Captain Tarbuck goes off to oversee the crew. You are left standing by the rail talking to Vestella.

If you ask her advice concerning dragons' eggs, turn to **89**

If you ask her to help you acquire a dragon's egg, turn to **5**

If you ask what she knows about the waters you're travelling through, turn to **15**

73

'Ere, don't you go pushing me around, all *right?*' snaps the crewman as you give him a shove. Tempers flare, and in moments you are struggling on the deck.

Roll a die.

If you score a 1, 2 or 3, you win the fight despite taking a bloody nose

in the process; lose one Life Force grade and turn to **82**

If you score 4 or more, the crewman hurls you down and doesn't stop until you are beaten black and blue: lose two Life Force grades and, if still alive, turn to **90**

74

First things first: you draw a picture of a dragon in the sand. Then you select one of the green-eyed islanders and, by pointing at the horizon, you manage to make yourself understood. He nods to indicate you should sail south-east.

Next you do the same thing, only this time setting the question to a yellow-eyed islander. He seems to be saying you should head south-west.

Next comes the tricky part. After much gesturing, you manage to get the yellow-eyed islander to understand a more complicated question. What direction, you ask him, would a green-eyed islander tell you to sail. His answer to this is they would say to go south-east.

So, do you know which way to go, now?

While you're here, you have a chance to buy some melons off the islanders. Each melon you buy costs one gold piece and counts as one item. Take as many as you can carry or can afford. Your mission over, you row back to the ship.

Turn to **83**

75

Enraged, Captain Quemada draws his sword and slashes at your retreating back. Lose one Life Force grade. Gritting your teeth in pain, you nonetheless manage to stagger out of the tavern and up the gangplank of the *Pen-dragon*. Behind you, Quemada starts up the gangplank in pursuit and then thinks better of it. You glance back to see him make an insulting gesture and then turn on his heel and stride off.

Turn to **3**

76

'Silly, silly, silly,' it shrills when you give your reply. A weird grin spreads across its lips as it flies off towards the others

of its species. Before long they have all taken up the cry and come drifting out of the gloom to mock you.

'Sssh!' you say anxiously, convinced they are foolish rather than malicious. Individually your voices may be soft and whispering, but altogether you make enough noise to wake up the Earth Dragon who sleeps below . . . '

You hear a great roar and look down. Eyes like red-hot rubies shine up out of the darkness. You see a vast reptile-like head rising on a sinuous neck. Then the Earth Dragon opens its maw and gives vent to a sheet of blinding flame.

The strange creatures give thin cries of panic and fly higher up the shaft, out of reach of the blast. You are not so fortunate. The dragon's flame burns you to a crisp - the abrupt end to your adventure that Treguard warned you about.

77

If you have the codeword LITTORAL, then turn to **94** if you also have the SEAMANSHIP Skill, and to 10 if you do *not* have this Skill



If you do not have the codeword LITTORAL, turn to **20**

***78**

You get a job as a bouncer at one of the seedier waterfront taverns. You have little trouble handling most of the drunken old salts who try causing trouble. However, one night a huge ox of a man from Nubia starts laying about him with a metal hook. After a fraught struggle, you finally manage to knock him senseless with a couple of strong punches - but not before the hook has torn a nasty gash in your shoulder.

Lose one Life Force grade, but note that you now possess a metal hook, since the previous owner is in no shape to demand it back. You are also paid

twenty-five gold pieces for your week's work.

Now turn to **12**

79

'Tell me, chum,' he says chirpily, 'are you the front end of a donkey?'

'No,' you say.

He looks about him, feigning amazement. 'No? No, you say? Well then, are you by any chance the *rear* end of a donkey?'

'No,' you say, staring at him as though he's quite deranged.

'In that case,' he declares, beaming at all the onlookers, 'in that case, you're no end of an ass! Ha ha, gotta laugh, ain't yer?'

You are just about to thump the wretch for his insolence, when a rotten tomato comes sailing out of the crowd and splats against his forehead. Now, that *does* strike you as worth a laugh.

'We've heard that one, Motley,' jeers the man who threw the tomato. 'When are you going to get some fresh jokes?'

'When you get some fresh vegetables,

mush,' rejoins Motley, glaring woefully back across the man's grocery barrow and wiping the tomato juice out of his eyes.

As the crowd disperses, and Motley slopes off in search of a more appreciative audience, you call after him: 'Actually, tomatoes are fruit.'

He doesn't seem to hear you. He's already humming another song:

*'Islanders of xanthous gaze
Are noted for their truthful ways
But those with eyes of virid hue
Certainly will lie to you.'*

At least this one seems to scan a bit better than the first. Whistling the tune, which you find curiously intriguing, you make your way on towards the docks.

Turn to **60**

80

'Come back here, you pilfering swine!' you snarl, chasing after Hands and grabbing his greasy cloak,

'You've got the wrong man,' he whines. And then, realizing that with a reputation like his no-one would believe him

anyway, he tries to knee you in the gut and run off. A violent struggle ensues.

If you have a sword and wish to draw it, turn to 4 if you have the SWORDPLAY Skill and to **14** if not

If you use the FISTICUFFS Skill, turn to **24**

Otherwise, turn to **34**

***81**

The *Pendragon* sails on under velvet blue skies with just a few high wisps of lacy cloud. The days pass. You begin to make friends among the crew, who are a jovial bunch with many tall stories of the exotic ports they've visited. 'In one city, there is a colossal genie which stands astride the harbour mouth,' the cabin-boy tells you. 'If you try to evade the harbour tax, he reaches down and plucks your ship from the water!'

On the fifth day out, you sight land. As it comes closer, you can make out a group of gangling white figures lounging around idly on the beach. They show little interest in

the *Pendragon* other than emitting doleful bleats when hailed.

They seem to be barely two feet tall,' observes the captain. 'What do you take them to be - albino pygmies?'

'Who knows?' replies the second mate. 'But notice the coconut palms beyond the beach. It would make a welcome change from dry biscuit.'

If you suggest taking a rowboat in to shore to collect some coconuts, turn to **35**

If you caution against going ashore, turn to **25**

82

You stand over the crewman, who has had enough and is begging for mercy. No-one else is in any hurry to insult you. You turn on your heel and stalk off to sleep in your hammock.

During the night, you are suddenly seized by many hands. A dirty rag is jammed into your mouth and you are roughly bundled up on deck. The sailors glare down at you in the moonlight, their faces contorted with resentment. 'Here's

where you're getting off, matey,' says one in a threatening whisper.

You see the officer of the watch up on the poopdeck. It seems to you that he's deliberately turning a blind eye to this rough justice! With gloating chuckles, the sailors wrench you up on to the gun-wales, then pitch you over into the sea.

If you have the SWIMMING Skill, turn to **54**

Otherwise, you are doomed to drown there in the cold ocean.

***83**

As you continue on from the strange island of Blepharos, Captain Tarbuck asks your advice as to which way to steer in order to reach the Draconis Isles. 'Should it be south-east or south-west?' he wonders.

If you say south-west, turn to **7**

If you recommend heading south-east, turn to **17**

84

Captain Quemada also is a master of the sword. Your blades clash, filling the

tavern with sparks and ringing steel, as the battle sways to and fro. At one moment you have Quemada on the retreat, hurriedly backstepping across overturned stools; the next moment he finds a fresh reserve of strength, and you are forced to roll back across a table to evade his lunge.



Equally matched, you fight on until the city militia arrive to intervene. 'There has been considerable damage to the tavern,' says the militia sergeant. 'Also, you risked injuring these innocent bystanders.' You are arrested and put in jail for a period of one week. When finally freed, you are horrified to learn that the *Pendragon* is almost ready to sail. You must hurry to the docks if you are to have any hope of travelling aboard her. As you go, you pass

under a narrow window from which you hear an anxious cry in a foreign tongue: *'Succurre mihi!'*

If you decide to investigate, turn to **6**
If not, turn to **12**

85

For whatever reason, the creature seems satisfied. It blinks at you, then drifts slowly back across the shaft. As before, the motion is less like flying than like the leisurely motion of a tropical fish.

You continue down to the bottom of the crater. Streams of molten lava flow in channels through the rock, but the ground is not too hot for you to walk on. Scanning the rocks for dragon eggs, you start to make your way across the crater floor and then freeze in shock. Ahead of you, slumbering in the warmth of an open fissure, lies the Earth Dragon. You have never seen anything so huge! If it wakes up now, you haven't a chance.

Turn to **93**

86

You are amazed to find Captain Quemada waiting for you on the beach, along with his crew. You have never seen such a bloodthirsty bunch of cut-throats. Glancing beyond them, you see the rowboat in which they have come ashore. Some way out from the coast, Quemada's galley lies at anchor. Hunched over the oars, Quemada's slaves stare sullenly at the drama unfolding on the beach.

'Aha, my fine adventuring friend!' says Quemada. 'Well met.'

There is no doubt why he's here. Fearing to enter the dragon's den himself, he has decided to plunder your hard-won prize from you. You should never have told him of your plans.

If you have the WALK ON WATER spell, turn to **30**

Otherwise, there's no way for you to take on Quemada and all his pirate band. He takes the egg and, laughing lustily, leaves you stranded there - turn to **77**

***87**

You find a dingy tap-room where sailors meet to gamble away their earnings. As you shuffle the greasy stack of cards, you weigh up the odds and declare your opening stake. Decide how much you will wager, then turn to **22**

88

Do you have the THIEVERY Skill?

If so, turn to **59**

If not, turn to **65**

***89**

Tor one thing, you can't make an omelette without breaking them. Ha ha.' She sees you don't share the joke, and her laughter subsides to a twinkling grin. 'Oh well, seriously, then... they're quite large and difficult to break. Look a bit like round rocks, in fact, except you can tell a dragon's egg by the golden speckling on it. And if you're collecting them, be sure to tread carefully. Wake up the dragon whose eggs you're stealing and you're liable to end up *flambeed*.'

Vestella can't think of anything else on the subject, and is too tired after her ordeal to answer any more queries. As she goes off to find a bunk, you turn your gaze to the waters that lie ahead.

Go to **81**

***90**

Another day passes before land is sighted again.

'We must go ashore here,' asserts the captain, 'as we need to stock up on fresh water.'

While the *Pendragon* rides at anchor, a rowboat is sent over to the shore. You volunteer to be part of the away team, which also comprises the bo'sun, the second mate, and three ordinary seamen. On reaching the shore, you are greeted by a number of the island's inhabitants. You cannot understand their language, but they seem friendly enough. The odd thing is, some of them have yellow eyes while others have green eyes.

'We need to know whether to steer south-east or south-west to reach the Draconis Islands,' the bo'sun tells you.

These chaps ought to know, but we can only communicate by nods and shakes of the head.'

That means you have to ask a yes/no question - but with only two choices of direction, that should be no problem.

If you ask a yellow-eyed islander, turn to **55**

If you ask a green-eyed islander, turn to **64**

If you have the codeword OCULAR, turn to **74**

***91**

You make your way up the steep slopes of the dormant volcano that rises from the centre of the island. The jungle is thick, with creepers and vines that you have to struggle through, and several times you have to pause to rest. But at last, when you reach the top, it is worth the climb: the whole island is laid out beneath you, a breathtaking swathe of gold-fringed greenery in the rich azure of the ocean.

You glance down into the crater of the mountain. Fierce waves of dry furnace-



like heat rise up from the bowels of the rock. Staring down, you can just make out the glimmering of light in the darkness. And you see that there is a narrow ledge winding down . . .

There is nothing for it but to descend into the volcano.

Turn to **28**

92

You let fly with a punch that sends Quemada reeling. 'Ugh, you scurvy dog,' he gasps, wiping blood from his lips, 'I'll carve out your liver for that!'

If you decide to pit your brawling ability against his skill with a sword, turn to **8**

If you decide to beat a retreat while he's still slightly stunned, turn to **18**

93

If you earlier learned the SNEAK spell and haven't used it yet, turn to 9

Otherwise, you must try to creep past the dragon as quietly as you can. Roll one die: if you score four or less, turn to **19**; if you score five or six, turn to **29**

94

For someone of your talents, it is child's play to build a raft with the materials you have to hand. After only a few days, you have a seaworthy craft ready that is sturdy enough to get you back to civilization. With your dragon's egg clutched firmly under your cloak, you return to the spot on the quayside where you arrived.

Turn to **40**

*95

Mindful of your role as a would-be champion of chivalry, you embark on a spree of thievery, careful only to take from rich merchants whose cruelty and greed are well known.

Roll one die. If you roll 1 or 2, you are caught red-handed and thrown in jail; your adventure ends here. If you roll 3 or 4, your takings for the week add up to thirty-five gold pieces. If you roll 5 or 6, you not only get thirty-five gold pieces but you also steal a tiny ruby brooch.

If you were not arrested, you can now continue your adventure by turning to **12**

96

You are ashamed to admit that you lost the egg to a pirate.

Tew adventurers are brave enough to enter a dragon's lair,' said Treguard.

'And even fewer are then silly enough to lose the hard-won treasure . . . ' puts in Pickle.

Treguard nods in acknowledgement, then turns back to you, saying, 'You have taken the Nightmare Challenge and come within a hair's breadth of success. Maybe you'd like to have another go . . . ?'

You sigh. There is nothing for it but to turn back to the start and try again.

Treguard inspects the egg for a few seconds and then gives you a hearty slap on the back. 'Well done!' he booms. 'Few adventurers are brave enough to enter a dragon's lair.'

'And even fewer live to tell of it . . . ' puts in Pickle.

Treguard gives the imp a sharp silencing look, then turns back to you, saying, 'You have taken the Nightmare Challenge and proved equal to it. Now you may count yourself among the Champions of Chivalry!'

You deserve such praise. It is a great moment indeed.

